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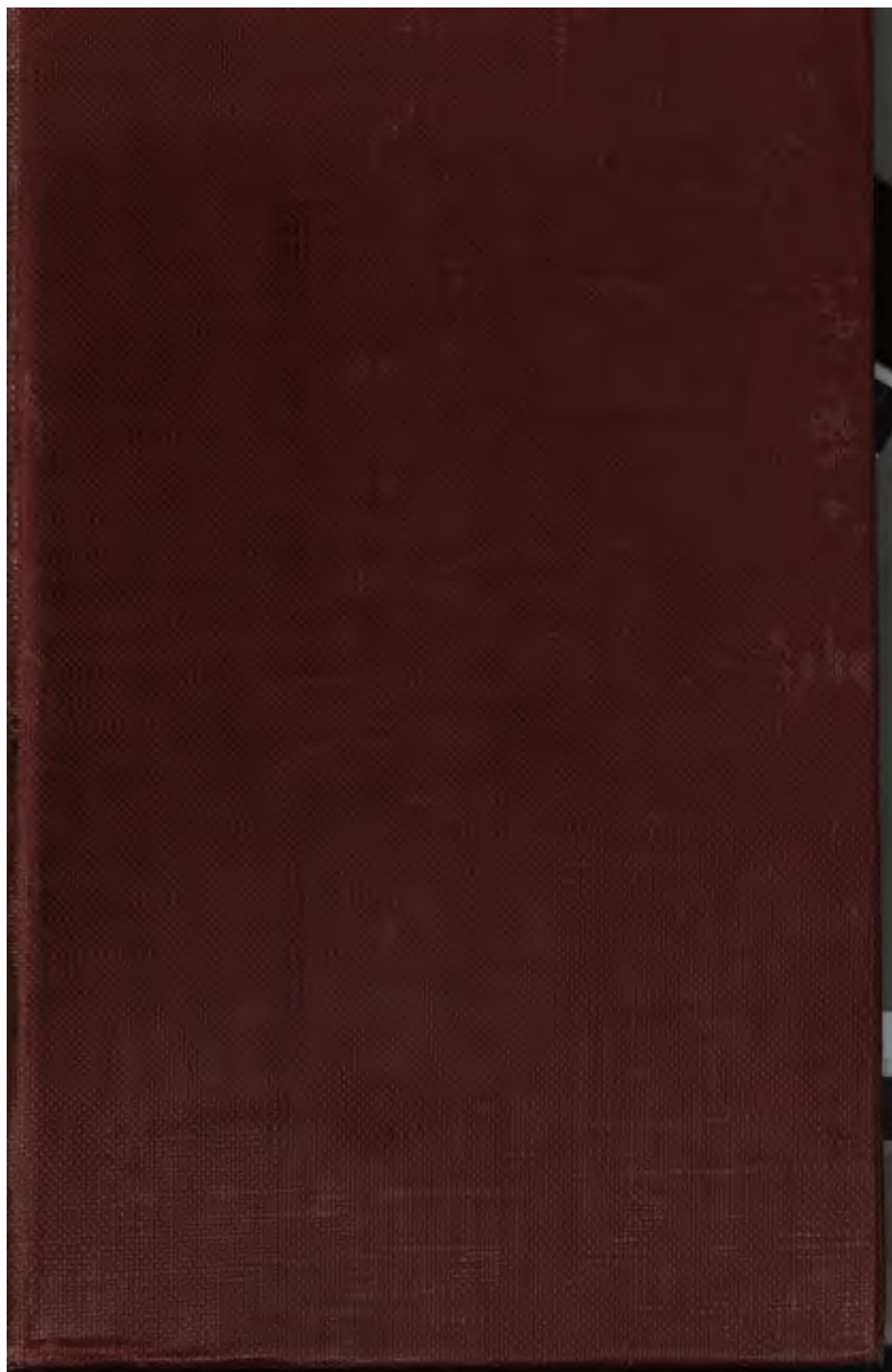
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AN
ESSAY
ON THE
STUDY AND COMPOSITION
OF
BIOGRAPHY,

BY
JAMES FIELD STANFIELD.

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AS A
TESTIMONY OF RESPECT
FOR A
CHARACTER
STANDING SO DESERVEDLY CONSPICUOUS
IN THE ROLLS OF
PATRIOTISM AND LITERATURE,
These Pages
ARE, WITH MUCH DEFERENCE,
INSCRIBED
TO
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS,
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OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,
PATRON AND PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN INSTITUTION,
K. G. &c. &c.
BY
THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

THE *end* proposed to be attained by this Essay is—to take such a view of Biography, as may assist in developing the principles of man's active and moral nature; and in applying that knowledge to his practical improvement.

The *means* proposed to accomplish this, are certain arrangements, inductions, and observations, which have been derived from an attentive study of Biography; from a patient and extensive survey of living character, in various countries and stages of civilization; and from an early

and constant exercise of considering *self-movements*, in all their springs, courses, and apparent destinations.

The *motive*, which impelled both to the Essay, and to the resolution of laying it before the public, was, and is—a sincere desire to promote, in students as well as writers, through the medium of biography, a more attentive examination of the principles of the human character; and a very ardent hope, that the effects of such investigation may be actively applied to the improveable points of education and conduct.

It may appear presumptuous to engage in a didactic treatise on Biography, at a time when that species of writing is so generally cultivated; and when so many elaborate compositions of the kind are brought before the established literary tribunals—to have their principles, arrangement, and execution, investigated and decided on by the received laws of biographical criticism. But, though the Lives of celebrated men have become,

more than formerly, the subjects of literary labour, and though such works, from their frequency, have attracted critical animadversion, yet, no regular compact dissertation on the general subject of biographical composition has ever yet appeared.

The author of the present Essay does not, in the extended view he wishes Biography to be considered, feel himself competent to supply this vacancy: but if his effort can be an instrument of directing to this interesting subject the attention of those more qualified to undertake the task, he has gained one important point of his general purpose.

As a part—and a main one—of the author's plan has been to collect materials for a moral and intellectual history of man, every instance, tending to that purpose, if not of material import, may be found useful. In this aspect of the matter the simple account of the origin of this undertaking cannot, to congenial minds, be wholly unacceptable. In pursuing another study—that of the general human charac-

ter—much biographical reading and observation became necessary : and in order to facilitate the process, and to arrange facts and principles, the form of a system was extracted from the nature of the study itself, which, from the accumulation of fresh analogy and observation, grew every day more applicable and comprehensive. This synopsis was seen by a judicious, but partial friend—who, alas ! has not been spared to witness either the censure or the approbation its completion may draw. This friend thought that something like the plan before him, a little more extended and filled up, might become useful to the general reader of biography : and under that idea the attempt was made, which has terminated in the present Essay.

In entering upon the studies having relation to a design so important, it became necessary to take a view of biography, as the subject had been generally treated ; to examine the nature of the disabilities it might have laboured under, in order to consider of the means of supplying de-

iciencies, or of suggesting improvements. For this purpose, the detrimental or disqualifying circumstances have been examined, as they subsist in the constitution of the *subject* itself. These will be found to consist in the want of clearness and connection in the materials; the distance of time intervening between the period of writing and that of the personage whose actions are to be recorded; and the difficulty in obtaining sufficient and genuine information. Deficiencies are also found in the *narrator*, where the personal requisites and preparatory studies are wanting; or where there is a total absence of the biographic spirit. Disadvantages may be again considered, as influencing the actual *composition*, or as existing in the union of the author with his subject; such as may arise from culpable partiality or resentment, from credulity or scepticism, from confused method or faulty execution.

Having enumerated and remarked upon the disadvantages biography has encountered, the second part will consider them in a different aspect; with a view of far-

nishing auxiliaries, or intimating improvements. The essential requisites and preliminary acquirements (regarded as of high importance) are insisted on and discussed at some length;—the biographic spirit is ascertained and expounded, and its threefold influence, in the subject, the writer, and the student, illustrated by observation and example;—the impartiality which should direct investigation, and the moral power of decision with which the writer is invested, are considered and discussed as the sacred duties of his station;—and, lastly, the materials of which biography is composed are distinctly surveyed,—their relations, connections, and arrangement; the principles by which they are animated, and the laws by which they are governed, together with the auxiliary matter which may be obtained from analogy and the knowledge of general character.

The third part enters upon the important business of actual composition; upon a comprehensive yet detailed view of the order and process of the work. It considers the expediency of introduction and

preliminary character; and passing through the different stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, manhood, and declining age, connects the distinct characteristics of each with the general progression of the whole. In a second division of this part, a more distinct view is taken of the human character, in its constitutional disposition, and in its changes and shiftings from the influence of surrounding circumstances. The beneficial effects resulting to the study and delineation of character, from a more efficient application of comparison or parallels, are offered as an improvement. The doctrine of pursuits, whether directed to the particular points of distinct profession, or more comprehensively extended to objects of general advancement, is an important article in the sciences of man; the consideration of which, and a chapter on the possible influence of improved biographical study and composition, conclude the design.

In reviewing the different portions of this plan it will be found that the essayist, in every part, has aimed to extend his sub-

servations to the use of the biographical student, as well as to the consideration of the biographical writer. But though the reader may, in general, apply this series of remarks, both to the person who writes and to him who studies, it may be noticed, that in some places there will an obvious distinction; and that there exists, what might be called *biology*, as well as *biography*. Still, however, the essayist has proceeded with the aim of uniting both characters in as great a degree as possible. He has also endeavoured that THEY should be considered as associated with himself, in the whole train of studies which forms the substance of this Essay; that, as fellow-students, they should advance together, and from premises laid down and circumstances adduced, amicably join to mark the relations, and establish the conclusions, resulting from their joint researches. Under this form egotism will be sunk, and asseveration softened. In such a disposition, WE may, with some degree of hope, *together* enter upon such a topic as biography; where the materials are laid open to the attention of every observer, and the

appeal and application made to our own hearts and experience.

If, in the pursuit of these objects, there appear nothing new to the scholar and philosopher, the effort may, perhaps, furnish minds that have not given much attention to these things, with incentives and materials for such study; and even to those of higher attainment, it may not be an ungrateful employment to see known objects and combinations illustrated and confirmed; or in having an opportunity of correcting or improving what has been stated in error or imperfection. For the subject having been contemplated by the present writer, with long and with patient application, it is possible that some useful truths may be struck out, which, being the fruits rather of labour than of genius, might have escaped the transient observation of many, and yet may offer hints of improvement even to those well skilled in such speculations.

Quotations, where they seemed to enhance or elucidate any point of the inves-

tigation, have been freely introduced. The substance of these might easily have been melted into the general phraseology of the work, and thus have spared the pedantic appearance of such a number of citations. But as the whole aim is utility, and as that can only be effected by confidence in the soundness of an author's positions, more regard has been paid to the authority that may sanction the principles and practice offered in this essay, than to the eventual reputation of ingenuity and invention on the part of the writer. And though some of these insertions may appear as useless truisms, or superfluous repetitions, or, on the contrary, as bearing but a very distant application to the point in observation; in all such apparent cases, a closer view of the context will, perhaps, convince the discerning examiner, how well the comparison of minute points of coincidence, and of delicate shades of transition, may be employed to corroborate or disprove the questions under consideration,

Foreign quotations have been avoided, as not suitable to every class of readers.

It has, however, been found useful to the purpose intended, to make one exception: Bacon is the great master, by whose institutes this treatise has attempted to apply the science of induction to moral and intellectual operations; which process, that illustrious founder of genuine philosophy pronounces to be as much the object of his *ORGANUM*, as is its application to the analysis and composition of physical subjects.* To him, therefore, there is constant reference; and generally in his own emphatic language. In extenuation of this practice very high and recent authority may be adduced. "There is something in the *ipsissima verba* employed by Bacon, which every person much conversant with his works regards with a sort of religious reverence; and which, certainly, lays hold of the imagination and of the memory with peculiar facility and force."†

* Vide infra—p. 93.

† Professor Stewart—Preliminary Dissertation to his "Philosophical Essays."

In fine, the specific object in view is—to draw a more philosophical attention to the requisites of a biographer, and the construction of his work ;—to enhance that such a composition, to be complete, should be entered on by a mind imbued with requisite knowledge ; in full possession of a biographical spirit ; with acuteness and impartiality to investigate the truth, and with taste and independence of soul to give it genuine utterance. In the execution, it should resemble one of those masterpieces of art or science—where the great End, for which it was undertaken, shines clearly through the process ; where the divisions are in the most natural order, and defined by the most precise accuracy ; where every separate part is a complete whole, yet so linked to the associate members, that the general structure would essentially fail, wanting any of the parts ; where the transitions distinctly unite the several portions of the subject ; and where the external form displays grace, construction, symmetry, and expression.

ESSAY
ON
BIOGRAPHY.

PART FIRST.

**BIOGRAPHY AS IT HAS BEEN TREATED, AND THE
DISADVANTAGES IT HAS LABOURED UNDER,**

CHAP. I. *In the Subject itself.*

**SECT. I. FROM OBSCURITY OR INDISTINCTNESS OF
MATTER.**

Nam primo, sensus ipsius informatio, et discernens et fallens : observatio indiligens et inæqualis, et tanquam fortuita : Traditio vana, et ex rumore : Practica operi intenta et servilis : vis Experimentalis, cæca, stúpida, vágá, et prærupta : denique Historia * * * levis et læops, et insignissimam Materiam intellectui ad Philosophiam et Scientias congesse-
runt.

VERULAM. IN DISTRIBUTIONE OPERIS.

MAN'S natural faculties, his education, the progressive intercourse and mutual impression between him and surrounding circumstances, with the habits, course, and conduct of life, re-

sulting therefrom, offer the principal materials to the discerning biographer. These can never be furnished with certainty and exactness, but from the genuine stores of a man's own consciousness. There can be no perfect biography but that which is written by a man's self; who, not only has it in his power to trace with accuracy and connection the continued progression of his pursuits and actions, but is, also, competent to view with conscious certainty the motives which produced them, and the ends to which they were directed. But, as our supply of genuine self-biography is but scanty, and as we shall have occasion to remark more particularly on that part of the subject in the course of the Essay, we must, for the present, take a view of the materials which generally furnish the stock of personal history. We must take them as they present themselves; connected or detached, shining or ordinary, interesting or futile, consistent or unequal: and, in this view, we must consider also the disadvantages which have attended them, from casualty and circumstances.

The want of clearness and connection in the materials, presents the first discouragement to the biographer's application. Obscurity of character is occasioned by deficiencies or concealments. When interposing vacuities occur and stop the

progress of description, or where veils have been thrown over the course of purposes and transactions, the observer is baffled in his attempts of delineation and research. In the one case, the links of continuity are broken, and progression impeded ; and in the other, the genuine series of events is either totally hidden, or so disordered, as to defeat all attempts at investigation : thus truth eludes the search, and the aim at biographical improvement is confounded by concerted or accidental concealment.

Obscurity and indistinctness will occur, when there are but few points in the character prominent enough to be made precise use of ; when the life is unequal, one part only conspicuous and the other buried in obscurity ; when the public actions or productions only are known, and the hidden causes and impelling circumstances are lost or concealed ; and, lastly, when there is eccentricity of character, running into desultory pursuits, without purpose, without system, and, sometimes, even without the appearance of chronological order. In these cases, the biographer is reduced to give an uninteresting sketch of disjointed circumstances and transactions. Dissevered as the different points or periods are, he scarcely has it in his power to supply deficiencies by the connecting principles of system or

analogy : he can only catch at insulated effects or detached incidents ; without tracing the links by which they were united, without being able to discover the causes which produced them, or the objects to which they were applied.

According to the method, which is meant to be offered by this Essay, one great and essential requisite in a biographer is, that he completely study and digest the life and character of his hero, before he sit seriously down to write his history ; that he bring to his narration a mind so well informed with the beginnings, progress, and terminations, of the transactions to be recorded ; that he be so well acquainted with the motives, counsels, and objects, which directed them ; with the habits, manners, and opinions, by which they were influenced ; the secret, as well as open impediments by which they were obstructed, and the auxiliaries by which they were assisted ; as that the narrative may bear the decisive marks of intelligence and truth, and impress upon the reader both interest and conviction.

When the points in the character are neither sufficiently prominent to be obvious, nor so decisive as to be applicable to the leading principles of action, this comprehensive, previous knowledge is unattainable by the biographer, and his

incomplete work, instead of a genuine picture of human life, will only offer a few irregular lines drawn from no perfect model ; distorted and broken ; or only continued and filled up by the indeterminate hand of adventurous conjecture.

Though there are great varieties in the same character at different periods of life, yet these varieties are brought about so gradually, and the links which unite the most opposite extremes have such a connection with each other, and bear such a relation to the several stages of action and conduct, that the minutest accounts of one portion of life will leave the biography imperfect, where we have no information to be depended on relative to the other periods. Amongst the ancients, as well as amongst many of the moderns, this disadvantage is as evident as it is discouraging to the biographical student. Scantiness of materials, want of diligence to collect them, or disinclination to use them when collected, can only account for such a number of defective pictures : and, to the former of these, we would willingly ascribe those incomplete sketches that are so frequently evident, even among the exhibitions of a Plutarch ; and which, in one case, has provoked the wonder, and almost the censure, of two of his most eminent expositors. What the Langhorns have said on this occasion, coincides so

much with what has been advanced of the scantiness or irregularity of the materials tending to throw an obscurity over the character, that it may not be improper to give the observation in their own words. "Whatever Plutarch's motive may have been, it is certain that he has given us a very inadequate and imperfect idea of the character of Cæsar. The life he has written is a confused jumble of facts, snatched from different historians, without order, consistency, regularity, or accuracy. He has left none of those finer and minuter traits, which, as he elsewhere justly observes, distinguish and characterise the man more than his most popular and splendid operations. He has written the life of Cæsar like a man under restraint; he has skimmed over his actions, and shewn a manifest satisfaction where he could draw the attention of the reader to other characters and circumstances, however insignificant, or how often soever repeated by himself in the narrative of other lives."

We must also account that character indistinct or obscure, where the public or shining actions only are recorded. Some of the most interesting and eventful transactions of history, it is well known, have been caused or influenced by the propensities and circumstances of private life;

and historians of the first rank have found it requisite to descend into the domestic circle, in order to discover the sources and incidents, from which the most momentous changes and actions have been derived. If, to make perfect the page of general history, the most private and familiar occurrences have been investigated, with what justice may we insist upon the necessity of being acquainted with those minute particulars of disposition and incident, that furnish the principles and directions by which the accounts of individual life should be conducted.

Much more might be advanced on this head, but as the subject, with an attempt in some cases to furnish a remedy to these defects, will be resumed in the course of the work, it may be here just necessary to observe, that we are, in this place, only remarking upon, and lamenting those imperfections which, sometimes, have been unavoidable ; and in this, as well as in the other disadvantages attending on biography, the liberal critic will make appropriate allowance for obscurity that was not to be penetrated—for deficiencies that could not be supplied.

SECT. II. REMOTENESS OF TIME.

The great aim of personal history is, to describe with clearness and fidelity the actions and characters of men. In true biography we should expect, not only a display of the shining transactions which forcibly press upon the eye of the observer, but also, the less-obvious circumstances which connect them with each other ; not merely the passing scenes of life, but also the habits, manners, objects, and pursuits, of the actors ; and where penetration can develope, or events bear us out in our judgment, the very motives by which the process is put into action : and such a comprehensive exhibition can only be brought to view by the full light of biographic truth.

To arrive at historical accuracy, many advantages should occur, which were, in some measure, denied to the diligence of former times ; as numberless obstructions must have interposed between the labours of our predecessors and the good effects of this all-directing principle. This discouraging reflection is not delivered as the dictate of modern arrogance, but pointed out in the humble endeavour of supplying the deficiency. We should regard with reverence the treasures

preserved to us by antiquity ; but our gratitude should not blind us to defects and errors, nor deter us from the hope and aim at a further improvement,

One of the most predominant causes of exception to the mass of biography now extant, is the distance of time which has frequently intervened between the writer and the character to be recorded. In this case, especially in those periods when writings, memorials, letters, and other documents, were not so well preserved as at present ; when copies of what had been collected were scarce, or mutilated, or destroyed, the biographer was under the necessity of taking such materials as had escaped the devastations of time, and the inaccuracy of transcribers. Discouraged thus by scantiness, by chasms, and incongruity, a few disjointed anecdotes are scattered over the barren narrative ; or attempts are made to link them together, by the feeble aid of dry reflections and fanciful conjecture, or to cover the deficiency with the splendid veil of rhetorical diction.

Though the detached exploits and eulogies of their chiefs be found amongst the earliest literary efforts of mankind ; though the heroic ballad and traditional verses of every early tribe and nation, shew an almost instinctive propensity to

this species of memorial ; yet there is little of regular biography to be found in the first stages of literary composition. In remote ages, the stories of eminent characters handed down from still earlier times, would be, comparatively, few ; and the rude models would seem fully equal to the indulgence of family or national celebration. Thus, they, who were interested and qualified to record the passing actions of their time, would scarcely feel the necessity of supplying former defects, by additional diligence or improvement in their bold sketches of contemporary history.

As the progress of science advances, and the communication of fact and observation is rendered more facile and certain, instead of looking on the objects and circumstances immediately passing, with a view to range them in accurate memorials for posterity, men are generally found directing their researches to the transactions and heroes of another period. A certain distance undoubtedly gives wholeness and a finish to the character in contemplation, which renders it not only attractive, but places it in a situation fit for the study and delineation of the artist ; yet it also often distends the object, giving it an undue magnitude, to the exclusion of nearer and more certain observation—*dum vetera extollimus, recentium incuriosi*. TACITUS.

It is a most discouraging circumstance to reflect, that human testimony, which is the foundation of historic faith, even in its most recent application, should be often partial, and too generally fallible. The contradictory accounts of different witnesses of the same fact, which we all have such frequent occasions to observe, are but too lamentable proofs of this remark. If then the attestation of contemporaries be liable to such defect, how much must testimony suffer in its transmission, through the glooms of time and aberrations of tradition? Negligence or ignorance in transcribers, losses through accident, mutilations or suppressions through design, the misrepresentations of national vanity or enmity, or of party-spirit still continuing,—all contribute, with increasing effect in each succeeding period, to obscure the accounts of remote circumstances and transactions, and to hand down imperfect materials to the view and investigation of the late observer. The disadvantages of the case are so evident, as to ask little elucidation from authority or example. It may, in this place, merely be added to what has been remarked in the preceding section, that these omissions and irregularities are but too frequent, even in the writings of so great a master as Plutarch. From the mutilations, losses, and distortions, which the matter of his histories had

suffered through the distance of time between the lives of his heroes and the period in which he wrote, he is, not seldom, obliged to omit the most interesting and valuable points of biography. He often commences his narrative with the middle actions of life; when the character is formed, designs matured, and, perhaps, the principal ends accomplished. In this imperfect delineation, the interest and improvement which should result from biographical study are lost; the representations are too desultory to fix the attention, and too defective to display an example. The gradual unfolding of the faculties, the influence of early impressions, the formation of habit, the effects of imitation, with every other circumstance that serves to form the complete and definite character, are necessarily wanting. The objects of pursuit, the motives which give them their value, and the means that were employed for their attainment, are equally indiscoverable. By such omissions, the utility which should result from these studies is indistinctly glanced at, or, perhaps, wholly removed from all reference of application. For, though transactions may be recorded, conspicuous enough to exalt virtue and debase vice, still we remain deficient in an enumeration of those helps and instruments by which *excellence* was attained, or of those propensities and depravations by which

turpitude was engendered ; thus wanting that fulness of example, which might assist in pointing out the regular advances of melioration, so useful in the one, or might deter, by exposing the gradual stages of criminality, too often leading to the other.



SECT. III. DIFFICULTY OF ATTAINING GENUINE INFORMATION.

When materials of a nature fit for biographic relation do really exist, there is often a difficulty of access or information, and, too frequently, a want of judgment or taste in the selection of those particulars that are essential to the genuine picture of human life.

The peculiar opinions, the minute circumstances, and the accidental or habitual directions, which influence the more evident appearances, and give force and determination to the obvious line of conduct, are deposited only amongst the nearest relatives, or most intimate connections. To these sources there is, generally, a difficulty of approach. Even when attainable, the biographic matter, so communicated, will suffer some detriment ; for, with such, (as Johnson, a perfect

judge in these cases, well observes) "the temptations and inclinations to disguise the truth" (though to write it be the first quality of an historian) are equal to their opportunities of knowing it; which motive for *sparing* persons "is a great impediment to biography."

Affectionate regard or tenderness of reputation will suppress particulars, which, though important to biography, do not reflect great honor on the deceased. Family pride will have the same effect, perhaps in a greater degree. There is also a culpable, but natural, sensibility, by which the communicator, reviving in himself the feelings of a lost friend, shudders at the exposure of circumstances, which, though essential to posthumous detail, would appear to wound the scrupulousness of living modesty.

CHAP II.

Deficiencies in the Writer,

SECT. I. FROM WANT OF PREPARATORY STUDIES.

THERE are very many, even among supposed biographers, who vainly imagine, that the delineation of a man's life, from his birth to his demise, is an agreeable, easy task,—requiring small pains in the preparation, and little effort in the performance. Such persons would feel surprise, were they requested to draw the likeness of the most familiar face, without having first acquired the general principles of the art of painting, and without having, by long and assiduous exercise, brought those rules into practical execution. Such surprise would be, obviously, well founded ; and yet these scrupulous personages would not at all hesitate to attempt, not the description of a single incident of a man's life, but, the full and accurate representation of his faculties, habits, opinions, and manners ; his particular passions, and his general conduct. They would undertake to exhibit his motives, objects, and pursuits ; the transactions he was engaged in, with the circumstances that influenced, and the

consequences that followed ; in short, the whole series of a connection of purposes and events, which link together the varied, yet regular, continuity of human existence. And all this would be presumptuously ventured upon, without any previous study of the general nature of man ; without a knowledge of the dominion of physical and moral causes, the power of the passions, or the phenomena of the strange but accountable shiftings of the human character.

Such a writer, unskilled in the regular succession of connecting particulars, as well as the distinctive prominencies of human agency, will, in his collection of materials, be confused and indiscriminate ; either producing a disorderly accumulation of all that could be gathered, or an incoherent display of such as appeared to be most shining or extraordinary. A mere relater of anecdotes, not a writer of lives, his account will be perplexed, because he does not know how to arrange—will be inaccurate, because he does not know what to select.

Without a previous knowledge of the nature of man, his general pursuits, his essential propensities, and common habits of acting, it is impossible to give a connected and regular history of particular transactions. A set of disjointed

passages, however lively in themselves and in the manner of their exhibition, does not constitute historical narration : they must be threaded together, to give continuity to the subject, and direction to the mind. How different soever the various incidents of life appear, they have their classes, their dependencies, and connections. The ordinary acts of producing these relations, or of generating one from another, have such a definite identity, that a true biographer may apply his terms of connection with such precision, as to derive very great assistance towards the devolving of causes, as well as towards the tracing of successive effects. Whereas, from the writer's ignorance of these hidden links which connect events with agency, and these general elements which impress similitude on the human character, the truth of biographical representation is distorted, and all attempts at characteristical investigation are defeated or confounded.

These unprepared writers frequently describe as wonderful and prodigious, what, to a mind skilled in the principles of human conduct, and habituated to trace the connection of incidents, would appear but as the common consequence of some evident or latent principle ; and will cursorily deliver that, as a matter of no im-

portance, which, from its biographical situation and condition, requires the minutest examination.

If these disadvantages bear hard upon the composition of personal history in general, they press, with tenfold effect, on what may be properly called *professional biography*.

It is certain that there is a numerous catalogue of lives, worthy to be preserved, and profitable to be studied, which, though important in circumstance, and striking in example, cannot be assigned to any exclusive class of employment or pursuit: and to such, the observations hitherto offered, in this section, will be applicable. But, in the wide range of human eminence, it will be found that celebrity has been, in general, pursued through some peculiar line or profession, and through some distinct course of application and performance, which is supposed to be carried on by certain appropriate principles, and a regular gradation of practice and improvement. Here, then, beside the indispensable acquaintance with the system of nature, whose principles are common to all mankind, it will be also necessary to have a more than moderate knowledge of that science, or pursuit, by which the character in review has become illustrious.

The aim of this species of biography is to describe, not only the professional reputation of the character, but also, the means by which that reputation was attained ; not merely the review of professional perfection, but likewise the inceptions, gradations, mode of application, accidental helps, difficulties overcome, and principles of improvement, which led to excellence. The scope of such a composition should be, to give the student information as well as example ; and, to this purpose, even technical terms may be admitted, but discreetly, and with some degree of limitation. In this view, it must be evident, how impossible it is to describe the process or transactions of a science or vocation, without an adequate knowledge of its principles and practice. The ill-informed writer will, in this case, incur a censure similar to that bestowed upon Mallet by the sarcastic Warburton ; who, when Mallet, after having written the Life of Lord Bacon, was about to undertake that of the Duke of Marlborough, emphatically pronounced ; that as in his first work he had forgotten that Bacon was a philosopher, so in his next he might not remember that Marlborough was a general.

SECT. II. WANT OF THE BIOGRAPHIC SPIRIT.

Having looked with regret on the disadvantages which biography has laboured under—in the subject-matter itself; from the distance in time between the narrator and the period in which his hero flourished, from the difficulty of obtaining information, or gaining access to documents on the subject; and, lastly, from an obscurity or indistinctness which often pervades the character to be delineated; having also taken a transient glance at the unfitness of a writer's attempting to trace the consecution and dependence of circumstances, incitements, pursuits, and events, occurring in the life of man, without a previous knowledge of his general nature, and a minute investigation of the separate-influence and specific variation of particular cases—we are now called upon to enforce a principle, so requisite to biography, that, without it, the most laboured narration will appear but a senseless, uninforming mass. Here, as well as in the preceding section, we must refer our reader to the course of the Essay for further thoughts on this head; offering, however, on account of the distribution of the subject, a few observations in the present division.

Of all the species of moral helps, requisite to the composition and study of individual history, there appears to be not one more wanting to its improvement, than that peculiar taste, that inclination, that earnestness, to which we have ventured to give the term of BIOGRAPHIC SPIRIT. And though in many of the works of the great masters we find it scattered and floating, and, in some of their happier essays, even so fixed, that the principle may be recognized and identified, yet it is seldom heightened to that obvious and continued warmth, which excites our sympathy, and that conscious elevation of intelligence, which gives confidence to our application.

To excel in any art or science, there is requisite a propensity, either innate or acquired—a fondness of it—a faculty of seizing upon, and receiving into the mind, with efficacy and enjoyment, every thing that has relation to the favourite object. Without such enthusiasm, rich materials, even when molded by correct judgment, will but coldly draw forth our languid approbation; whilst, informed by this vivifying principle, a plainer subject will throw out the *characteristic expression*, which never fails to seize on attention, and which, animating and enlightening, excites and attracts every faculty of sympathetic emotion.

The different incitements to biographic composition, independent of such predilection, have been as various as the different dispositions, tastes, talents, and interests, of the several writers who have engaged in this department; and the execution has, of course, been proportionably dissimilar. Some are engaged, or engage themselves, in a voluminous range of the lives of men, as classified by rank, profession, or local situation. A long and continued exercise, in one department of biography, would seem to offer incitements and advantages to such an exclusive partition. In a certain train of composition, where, from the similarity of pursuits and habits, so many coincident circumstances and relations must arise, the writer may be supposed, in the process of his labours, to discover principles that will bear general application to the whole of those characters, who, proceeding in a determinate course of application, attempt, by similar means, to attain similar objects. Every discovery gives delight: and discoveries of principles, with facility of application, are the parents of scientific affection. But where much is projected, execution, as well as improvement, will depend upon the nature and energy of the powers that are brought to the undertaking; and, therefore, we find, amongst this description of writers, different degrees of this spirit, so essential to philosophic history,

from the inanimate, though useful sketches of Anthony Wood, to the luminous and orderly delineations of Melchior Adam.

Pre-eminent amongst biographers, for virtuous sentiment, mild philosophy, heroic description, familiar representation, and exquisite researches into the principles and powers of the human character, Plutarch stands conspicuous. The great outline he proposed to himself, to be filled up with portraits of the most illustrious princes, statesmen, and generals of Greece and Rome, though magnificent and attractive in the view, was yet attended with some disadvantage. Taking into his design, contemporary lives of public characters, he had, in some cases, to give to each a limited portion of what he had collected; such as seemed to belong more particularly to his present hero; and without too sensibly diminishing that stock, which was to be divided amongst so many claimants. Thus precluded by his plan, from bending the full force of his mind on the single character then before him, we cannot wonder if he, sometimes, be found deficient in that sympathetic enthusiasm, which is only to be excited by an undivided regard and attention to the condition, interests, and relations, of one attractive object.

The want of this concentration of interest is, also, most sensibly felt in his too-frequent, tedious comments and digressions ; which, though often valuable in themselves, considered as detached notes or dissertations, yet do so break the continuity of narration, and, as it were, remove the object so far and so long out of sight, that when we are again admitted to the scene of action, the mind has a new effort to make, in order to recommence that intimate union with the subject ; failing in which, the narrative drags coldly on—neither inviting attention, nor rousing sensibility. A sense of duty to the object in view has, in the present instance, led to these remarks : it must, nevertheless, be gratefully acknowledged, that no common portion of this noble fire animated the genius of Plutarch ; and though it did not appear to emit constant splendour, yet, rising with the importance or interest of the occasion, it shone forth, at times, with true biographic lustre.

The consiseness, which must necessarily be adopted in the compilation or composition of biographical dictionaries, will operate as a *re-mora* to the agency of this enlivening principle, either in the writer or in the student. The many unimportant names, which gain admittance into such a compilation, wanting in themselves the

efficacy to display the spirit of animation, will, beside this particular deficiency, also serve to cool or destroy the susceptibility which had been cherished by characters of an higher interest. Unless the subject be followed through its windings, directions, obstructions, advancements, and attainments, so that we may have an intimate as well as comprehensive view of all its bearings and concerns, it is impossible to regard it with sympathy and attention. The incentives to action, the habits and manners which influenced the pursuits, and the characteristic individuality impressed on the *whole* course of conduct, can only raise that interest, which lays hold of the feeling and judgment of the student, through the spirit and intelligence elicited by the author.

The improved state of modern literature has presented an ample and valuable store of select biography; and we receive the treasure with becoming gratitude. Materials are more easily collected, authorities are more accessible; selection is governed by judgment, arrangement is disposed by taste; philosophical penetration has disclosed the secret springs of action, and experimental sagacity has directed principles to their efficient objects. These great advantages, highly estimable as they must be, are, notwithstanding, sometimes lowered in their effect by a coldness

of manner, which pervades and renders torpid every intellectual effort. The march of narration is stately, the dependency of circumstances accurately arranged ; judgment presides, and philosophy directs ; yet still their is wanted, to realize the scene, that spirit of enthusiasm, which, breathing its influence on every part, actuates and vivifies the whole. " There is a proud coldness in the narrative, which neither invites sympathy, nor flatters the imagination. The author is never once betrayed into the language of emotion—we look in vain, through the whole narrative, for one gleam of that magical eloquence by which Rousseau transports us into the scenes he describes, and into the heart which responded to those scenes."

Edinburgh Review—on the Memoirs of Alfieri.

CHAP. III.

*Disadvantages arising from the relative Situation
of the Subject and Writer.*

SECT. I. PARTIALITY OR RESENTMENT.

THE most serious complaint against biographic writing, and what affects its very nature and purpose, is the partial light in which the subject to be represented is too frequently viewed and exhibited. To direct the investigations of observation towards the attainment of truth, is the plain duty of the moral biographer ; but unless he come to his work with an independent spirit of impartiality, an unbiassed and sacred regard for the distribution of equal justice, that duty must be violated, and the legitimate aim of this kind of writing be unaccomplished.

In reviewing the list of those who have been, or who may be, engaged in this walk of literature, we often find writers placed in certain conditions, which have a tendency of leading to culpable partiality and prejudice ; writers, who, from the nature of their relation to, or engagement with the subject, are liable to be deluded into a mistaken estimate of character, or seduced

into the more criminal practice of conscious misrepresentation.

In the first rank of biographers are marshalled those, who engage in the delicate and arduous undertaking of giving to the public, histories of their own transactions and sentiments.

That the memoirs of distinguished persons, when written by themselves, would seem to open the most accurate view of the secret springs and complicated machinery of the human character, may be assumed as, at least, a plausible position. But this apparent advantage of conscious self-examination must be attended to with circumspection : and, in order to trace the advantages and the errors attending such self-disclosures, it may be here suitable to introduce a few observations on the subject of auto-biography.

The first consideration that offers itself in this enquiry, and which is, indeed, conclusive as to the estimation to be formed of the performance, is, the object the self-biographer has in view, in giving his opinions and the actions of his life to the inspection of the public. The motives to such disclosures, though not numerous, are far from being inconsiderable.

To preserve to one's self the impressions made by passings transactions, to assist recollection, or for the mere indulgence of present amusement and literary exercise, journals have been entered on and continued. The circumstances, which have been part of our existence, will not, even in the lapse of time, cease to be interesting ; the pains taken in preserving such memorials will endear them to us ; an opinion of their intrinsic importance will, probably, be entertained or formed ; and all these considerations joined, or even some of them seperately regarded, may tempt the journalist to hope, that the same amusement, interest, and importance, which he felt himself, in the composition, will accompany his narrative in a public examination.

But transactions and observations may have been recorded from more powerful incitements, and with higher views. Where the writer has been engaged in matters intricate, uncommon, or eventful ; where the speculations, guided by skill and aided by opportunity, have been directed to objects useful and important ; then, if the scenes be worthy of exhibition, or the enquiries elicit results claiming public notice, the journalist may fairly furnish the biographer with the order, bearings, and dependencies, of his pursuits and actions ; with the rise, progress, improve-

ments, and proofs, of his researches and decisions.

There can scarcely appear any circumstance more attractive to the lover of biographic writing than this accumulation of facts, worthy to be recorded, coming from the pen of him who is best acquainted with their nature and arrangement, and most interested in establishing their value and veracity. Yet, amidst this promising store of treasure to be produced and evident inclination to display it, we may find it useful to pause a moment before we commence our study; we may find it necessary to take that principle into consideration, which must influence our estimation of the work; that motive which led the writer to the undertaking, that end which he keeps in view through the whole execution.

The man who resolves to write of himself, sits down in judgment on his own sentiments and proceedings. He is the reporter of his own cause; and, though he may seem, by publication, to refer his statements to popular decision, will, naturally, be inclined to extenuate his failings, defend his prejudices, and give a favourable turn to the whole tendency of his deeds and conduct. The dread of disgrace will cause him to palliate, or even to suppress weak points and

unpropitious instances ; and the love of fame will dispose him to dwell upon, and even amplify, such passages as seem to serve his cause, or raise his reputation. For this very purpose, perhaps, the memoir was projected ; and however candid and conceding the language and positions may seem to be, the intention will secretly pervade every portion of the work, and to that end will every sentiment and statement be ultimately directed.

Independent of a whole host of minor writers, some portion of this spirit is ascribed to historians, celebrated for their virtue and dignified fidelity. The great historical work of Thuanus, was violently attacked by the bigotted opponents of those liberal and independent views and sentiments which enrich and elevate that splendid production. But, instead of plunging into direct controversy by answering them, it is supposed, that the commentary or memoirs of his own life were written, chiefly, on account of his history. He thought the best mode of repelling the aspersions that were so malignantly directed against him, would be, to give to the world a full account and exposure of the formation of his character ; of all his purposes and pursuits ; of the companions amongst whom his habits were formed ; of the great men whose

practice and conduct he set up as models for his guidance ; his studies, his opinions, his public principles, and his official transactions : thus opposing to the volumes of calumny, which had been issued against him, the confutation of a narrative, disclosing the progress and conduct of an honourable and virtuous life.

Lord Clarendon bears a close resemblance, in many points, to the exalted character just mentioned. He has evidently set the example of Thuanus before him in many of the courses which he has pursued, as well as in the works which he has written. When, like his great prototype, he had written an history of the momentous times in which he had been an actor or spectator, like him, he composed memoirs of his life : a production, which, though it be, in some respects, an imitation ; yet in its execution, in tracing the influence of habits and example, in accurately pointing out the different stages of improvement in the human mind, and, above all, in just discriminations of the minuter shades and bearings of character, must be allowed to possess a decided superiority to the work of the illustrious Frenchman.

However their memoirs may be admired in the execution, they both have evidently written with

a view to represent their opinions, their writings, and their conduct, in a favourable aspect. The one, though allowed the highest praise for his liberal sentiments and rigorous impartiality in his historical labours, shews, in his personal story, an anxious aim to prove his invariable rectitude; a frequent glancing at his great work; and, in some degree, a virtual justification of its tenour and fidelity, against the cavils and calumnies which had been raised against it. The other biographer, although no man could better deduce the unfoldings of disposition from early impressions, hastens over the first seventeen years of his life in a single page of the folio edition, in order to come, at once, to the sole object of his writing—an account of the formation and disinterested progress of his political character. With this end in view, he proceeds, in the most skilful manner, to trace out the gradations and accidental occurrences, by which he was removed from a profession little suited to his views, to one more congenial to his powers and ambition. With great humility he ascribes all his merits to the example and society of his numerous friends, who are the most illustrious characters of the times. That answer to the remonstrance of the parliament, which was the instrument of all his future fortune, he states to have been drawn up, merely, for his own private

satisfaction. His connection with Archbishop Laud, his writings, his advancement in the king's favour, his subsequent dignities, his violent displeasure at his daughter's marriage with the Duke of York, together with the glowing characters which he draws of himself at different periods of his life—all these, and other points are so displayed, as plainly meant to impress the reader with the favourable conviction of his honour, wisdom, and integrity: for, as a respectable reviewer observes, "he wrote to shew, that through his whole life, he was ever in the right."

There is an unavoidable suspicion attendant on self-biography. Besides the temptations which we suppose may arise from the imperious dictates of self-love and love of fame, the mere circumstance of writing in the first person, will impress the reader that he is attending, only, to an *ex parte* evidence. The two authors, whom we have just noticed, prudently discerned, that such an objectionable form of communicating their sentiments would be injurious to their purpose; therefore, avoiding this cause of disgust, and imitating the judicious modesty of Cæsar in his "*Commentaries*", they have, like him and some few others, imparted their memoirs in the third person. But there are disadvantages, also, at-

tending this manner of relating the occurrences of a man's own life ; especially when pushed to the confines of affectation. Thus in the life of Lord Clarendon we frequently meet with the artificial phrases, " Mr. Hyde thought"—" Mr. Hyde was wont to say", &c. &c. and Thuanus confounds versimilitude still farther ; and in the assumed character of a friend, gives, as authority, the unnecessary circumlocution of "*sepius mihi narravit.*" By this mode, however, the exceptionable stamp of egotism is avoided, and a more dispassionate representation of acts and circumstances seems to result from the manner adopted ; coinciding, in some degree, with that rule of history, noticed by Lord Monbodo, " that an historian should not appear in his own work any more than an epic or tragic poet."

Cardan, Montaigne, and Rousseau, may be noticed on this occasion as self-biographers. Cardan wrote a most elaborate exposure of his opinions and life. Refining on the method of Suetonius, he has displayed, under different heads, his transactions, accidents, connections, attainments, propensities, and follies : indeed, he has left nothing untouched that could sooth his vanity, humour his eccentricity, and exhibit, in all points of view, the strange character by which he wished to be distinguished, " These and

several other things", says the acute Bayle, "he relates with the greatest simplicity. However, I make no question that, if his life were faithfully written by another hand, we should find a great many more dishonourable particulars than he has given us in that he wrote himself."

The essays of Montaigne seem to have been adopted by the author, as a mere vehicle to introduce his own sentiments and peculiarities ; a set of general positions, exemplified by the opinions and practice of an individual character. His apparent simplicity and candour would dispose the mind to acquiesce in the disclosures of his sagacious researches, but, in the free avowals of his weaknesses and peccadilloes, the affectation of frank honesty is evident ; and the venial errors, he so often brings to view, are placed in such an amiable light, that, instead of conceiving pity at the fallibility and frequency of his wanderings, we are engaged to esteem, by the seeming openness of his representations. Rousseau, well versed in the nature and limits of biographic confession, and consciously intimate with all the ramifications and disguises of vanity, expresses himself with sarcastic keenness on the subject. "I had always laughed at the false ingenuousness of Montaigne, who, feigning to confess

his faults, takes great care not to give himself any, except such as are amiable."

With Rousseau himself, his character, and his writings, we shall have much to do in this essay. His "Confessions" are rich in the materials for biographic study; and, perhaps, in no other writings can be found so full a display of the nature, rise, secret progress, and combination, of distinct passions, or of the elements, advancement, leading principles, and anomalous varieties, of the general character. At present, our remarks are not directed to an exhibition of his attainments or productions as an individual, but are limited to such habits and propensities as seemed to influence and vitiate his representations as a biographer. He pronounces his work to be the history of a man, who has the courage to shew himself, "*intus et in cute*"; and, with great justice, declares such a composition to be of use to his fellow-creatures. Of the utility of a work of this description there can be but one opinion: and, as to the high estimation in which such disclosures are held by minds of kindred enthusiasm, we will cite the testimony of Lavater, a competent judge of the subject, a vigilant self-examiner, and a deep searcher into the latent springs and more evident movements of the human character. "I must observe, that I should

think myself very much obliged to every person who would communicate to me such a genuine history of his life and his heart; interspersed with so many trifling incidents, and enriched with such an accurate account of bad, good, or indifferent, actions and sentiments. I should prefer the reading of such a book to the perusal of any one else, the Bible only excepted." *Letter prefixed to the Journal of a Self-Observer.*

Abundant in materials, and bold in the resolution not to conceal any thing that may assist in disclosing the nature of his thoughts and actions, Rousseau advances to this work of promise; and many, and curious, and valuable, are the discoveries he lays before us. But in the selection and display of his stories, we are disagreeably affected, to perceive every portion stained by the unrestrained diffusedness of insatiable vanity, and the accumulating amplification of inordinate pride; common events swelled into importance, mean objects occupying the place of momentous concerns, and degrading propensities obtruded into view, as claims of notoriety, and tests of original thinking. "He has not observed on the nature of vanity," says Burke, "who does not know that it is omniverous; that it has no choice in its food; that it is fond to talk

even of its own faults and vices, as what will excite surprise and draw attention, and what will pass, at worst, for openness and candour." Such is the unconquerable dominion of this passion, and such are the insidious encroachments it makes upon minds delivered up to its baleful influence.

We might to these examples add no small catalogue of other biographers, who, though of less celebrity as men or authors, yet actuated by the same passion, have fallen into the same deviations. Sufficient instances have been left to shew, that the advantages, which might appear to arise from the certainty of conscious knowledge, are weakened, and often destroyed by the influence of self-estimation and the love of fame.

Every man, who is resolved to give to the world his opinions and the transactions of his life, must rate them at such a degree of importance as to warrant the publication. Under such an impression, and from the very nature of his design, the writer is imperiously called upon to deliver all that can relate to the developement of his character and pursuits, without diminution as well as without aggravation. Biographic truth, without an ostensible infraction, may be violated, no less by suppressing some of the es-

sential particulars, than by exhibiting others in a high glare of colouring. A man of fastidious delicacy may be as wide of faithful representation as one of inordinate ambition. False glory and false modesty, says the Cardinal de Retz, are the two rocks, on which men, who have written their own lives, generally split.

Without loading this part of the subject with the names of the many who have given memoirs of their lives to the public, and with the disadvantages which have commonly resulted from the peculiar nature of self-description, we may proceed to consider some other sources of partial deviation, in this most delicate portion of literature.

Family, sect, party, profession, and country, have each their influence over a writer's imagination and judgment. Hence, circumstances and actions are viewed in such various lights, as frequently to lead to the misrepresentations of partiality on the one hand, and of prejudice on the other. Sons have written the lives of their fathers with a tenderness too amiable to draw reprehension, though conviction, sometimes, might be suspended. Wives and husbands, brothers, and others of a family, have recorded the opinions and transactions of their respective relatives with

more or less of this spirit tincturing their compositions : and every relation in which the writer stands with the character he proposes to display, will lend a proportionate bias to the drift of his design.

The clear and unsophisticated influence of pure religion can only direct the mind to an ardent love of truth, and the exercise of impartial justice. That mild spirit which regards the wide-spread family of mankind with equal eye, and whose bountiful precepts inculcate liberal benevolence, must dispose its genuine votaries, each to enjoy and practise his own established belief and ritual, without arraigning or disturbing the convictions and the observances held by others. But religion is a sentiment of feeling, as well as an exercise of reasoning ; and, beside the abstractions of intellect and the inculcations of doctrine, it has a reality and interest sufficient to excite the sensibility and raise the passions of the human heart. When passions and their objects are formed, every property and appendage of those objects will be considered as inseparable from them, and claim a proportionable share of affectionate regard. Though agreed in essential points, men often differ as to the attributes and modifications. Time, accidents, and the fallibility of our nature, (whilst religion herself

stands aloof and uncorrupted) have introduced some changes amongst the less-essential and ceremonial articles. Apparent indiscretion and abuse in these points have induced reform and revolution. Establishment has clung to its ritual with tenacity; and innovation, going beyond the point of moderation, has altered and destroyed with an unsparing hand. Amidst these conflicts, passions have been engendered of the most outrageous kind. Whichever party has the ascendancy will invariably be found to persecute; and where there is persecution there will be invincible enthusiasm to bear up against it. Controversy, prejudice, bigotry, and blind zeal, have been the offspring of these collisions; and in the tumult, history and biography have suffered in their dearest interests.

In the deliberate resolution to publish the history of a personage of the writer's own, or of an opposite persuasion, what a vehicle is presented for the conveyance of panegyrical zeal or calumniating prejudice! Whatever can vindicate or exalt the one sect, or cast censure and degradation on the other, is eagerly employed; and the whole laborious essay, most likely, furnishes an incongruous mass of apology and reproach, of lavish encomium and sedulous misrepresentation. Even scrupulous conviction, when

touched by a portion of religious fervour, will induce the professor to give credence and applause to the actions of his own party, and to doubt and place in a particular point of view those of a different communion ; and all this conscientiously, and without a purpose of going beyond the limits of what he actually believes to be the bounds of truth and justice. But as imposture follows hard upon the steps of enthusiasm, with equal pace do injustice and misrepresentation proceed in the train of religious zeal and sectarian spirit. Thus the writer, who commences with the honest aim of doing equal justice to the motives and proceedings of the several characters under his review, warmed by the subject and swayed by his opinions, will acquire increasing ardour as he proceeds, and terminate, perhaps without consciousness, in partial eulogy or prejudiced detractation.

It is to be hoped that the examples of this class will be found superior, in numbers and estimation, to those, who, without scruple or respect, invade the sacred province of biography, as a field for controversial argument—as an opportune station, from whence to issue proud assertions of infallibility, and bitter sentences of exclusion. The urbanity and liberal candour of modern improvement have corrected and softened the

rude features of former biography ; but so much of this disposition has existed, and, consequently, is so continually before the eyes of the student in this department, that it would appear an omission to pass over, without animadversion, so great an obstacle to the study and composition of personal history.

Eusebius, in his life of Constantine, expressly declares, that he will record of that emperor's life and actions, only such as bear a reference to a pious and blessed course of life, and to the glory of the Christian religion. He suppresses all matters, however essential to a true estimate of character, which might seem to degrade his hero ; and amongst those omissions, that strong circumstance, the murderous execution of his son, the amiable Crispus. His whole aim is to exalt Constantine into a saint ; whilst Zosimus, actuated by as criminal a partiality on the other side, reduces him to a devil. Bale and Pits, two biographers of opposite persuasions, give direct example of the effects of this religious bias. Pits, a zealous Roman catholic, seizes every opportunity to vindicate the tenets and the transactions of the professors of his own faith, as well as to censure those of his adversaries ; and Bale, with equal violence, blackens every character that has relation to the church of

Rome ; and will not allow a pope or a cardinal to die a natural death, virulently aiming thereby to establish the depravity or odium which he deems inseparable from the character.

The acrimonious representations and charges of these two writers have been justly exposed to indignation by the authors of the *Biographia Britannica*. That elaborate work has furnished an ample and critical display of national celebrity and excellence, of historical and literary information. It has all the cautious penetration of Bayle, without his scepticism or ambiguity : and, conceding the disadvantages inseparable from the dictionary form, affords a noble supply of facts to the curious, and of observations to the contemplative. As, in this finite state of things, perfection cannot be attributed to any human production, however pre-eminent ; so to these excellent volumes some biographical deviations have been ascribed : nor can it be unexpected, that partiality would be imputed to a work so exclusively national.

Campbell, an ample contributor to this noble compilation, and one, who brightened dull narrative with critical discussion and philosophical research, is represented by Doctor Kippis, his able successor in that great work, as being actu-

ated by excess of candour and an amiable partiality in favour of the characters he described. Walpole, flippantly enough, names the work *Vindictio Britannica*, or a Defence of every body : and this character, it must be allowed, applies, with justice, to many of the articles. The patriotic delineator will sometimes deviate from the province of the liberal philanthropist. Sect, family, and even name, may be found to lift obscure subjects into more than warranted notice : and where the majority of the writers have a common measure of proportional estimation, and are actuated by the same notions, principles, and observances, it may be expected, that, in some instances, characters will be elevated or depressed, as they suit, or vary from the established standard. In this great national repository, where so much has been done, and done so excellently, it would appear invidious to search curiously for examples to this effect. The general observation, however, naturally falls in here ; where we are remarking on disadvantages, which arise from the peculiar form of the publication, as well as from the possibility of a partial spirit affecting even the attributed candour of the authors.

In this place, with all qualified respect to the genius and talents of so eminent a man, it seems

proper to animadvert on some deep shades in the character of Doctor Samuel Johnson, as a composer of personal history. His general claims on attention, in this interesting department of literature, are obvious and incontrovertible. The advantages, which multifarious reading and extensive opportunities of observation gave to his keen perception, have enriched his pages with no inconsiderable portion of genuine biographic spirit. He looks, with almost intuitive decision, on the motives, directions, and determinations of moral action ; glances over the map of the human mind with a spirit of generalization as well as detail ; and, in his unbiassed moments, pronounces, with critical accuracy, on the design, materials and structure, the felicities and failures, the legitimate excellencies and censurable defects, of literary composition.

But, as maniacs, when the theme of their malady is touched upon, become disorderly and outrageous ; so, no sooner do the religious, national, or political prejudices of Doctor Johnson, seem to find an opponent in the character that comes under his examination, than his candour and his judgment both appear utterly to forsake him : natural spleen is inflamed into irascibility, and the malevolence of prepossession vents itself in declamatory reproach or insidious misrepresen-

tation. The perversion of his judgment and talents in the character he has drawn of our immortal Milton, would, alone, mark him as a lamentable example of the influence which religious or political prejudice has over minds, otherwise, enlarged and vigorous ; but his intolerant and bigotted attacks on every person and circumstance that do not square with the measure of his own narrow superstition, shew a mind inveterately disposed to consider matters and persons in that view only, which is furnished by the lights of his peculiar principles and opinions. This acrimonious spirit appears to have gained such a dominion as to affect his criticism, even on occasions where his darling prejudices were in no danger of meeting an opponent. It is with justice remarked by Bishop Newton, that never was any biographer more sparing of his praises, or more abundant in his censures, than Doctor Johnson. He seemingly delights more in exposing blemishes, than in recommending beauties ; slightly passes over excellencies, enlarges upon imperfections ; and not content with his own severe reflections, revives old scandal, and produces long quotations from the forgotten works of former critics ; and to close in the words of Anna Seward, who knew the censor well, " this was the spirit, which dipt in aqua-fortis the biographic pen, which chronicled our poets."

From what has been advanced in this section on the partialities and dislikes, which may tend to mislead the biographer from the clear line of faithful representation, other sources of this culpable bias may be summarily adverted to, without dwelling too minutely on the detail. Examples, from the influence of country, profession, party, friendship, enmity, and other minor relations, are numerous, and apply directly to our present observations. Some of these we shall glance at, as concisely as their application to the purpose will allow.

The love of our country is one of those acquired passions, which, uniting many in one common sentiment, is the source of some of our most delicious emotions, and leads to energies patriotic and exalted. But predilection, amiable in its legitimate exercise, loses the value of rectitude, when it touches, with a partial hand, the scale of historical or biographic justice. As fellow citizens, we may feel delight at extraordinary exhibitions of national heroism and national genius ; but if the pictures be heightened by a partial display of false colouring, we suffer in our opportunities of contemplating the genuine forms of nature, in the clear mirror of biographic fidelity ; accuracy is sacrificed to flattering delusion, and gratification is purchased at the expence of truth.

When errors are supposed to exist amongst authors who hold high ranks in the republic of literature, their compositions should be attended to with more circumspection than might appear necessary in the examination of the works of minor artists. The more illustrious the example, of so much more consequence is it to note the blemishes that sully it; which, being often placed in the shade of so many splendid beauties, may escape without notice, or, melting into the general character of the piece, may even pass into unwarrantable sources of imitation.

Partiality to his countrymen, and evident inclining to the aristocracy, have been imputed as blemishes to the biographical writings of Plutarch. His "Comparisons", which, with some incidental exceptions, are rather a balance of actions and conduct, than a philosophical application of characteristic similarities, seem to have been composed in the peculiar spirit of the Greek writers, "*qui sua tantum mirantur.*" The parallels of Cicero and Demosthenes, of Cato and Aristides, Sylla and Lysander, Marcellus and Pelopidas, will particularly evince the justice of the charge; which may be further strengthened, by observing, with attention, the tenour of those lives to which they are appendages. Rapin, in his Historical Reflections, remarks that Plutarch

shews the force of his national prejudices by his obvious animosity to Herodotus, resenting the disparaging character which this great historian had given of his country, Bœotia.

His aristocratic predilection has been often noted. The life of Coriolanus, and that of Pompey, have been adduced as evident instances; and, in the former, he has been accused of suppressing the most aggravating passage, in the famous speech of his hero, on the occasion of distributing a supply of grain, received in a time of scarcity—in which he proposed the holding up the price of bread-corn as high as ever, in order to keep the people in dependence and subjection. If Plutarch can be supposed to have made this omission purposely, it will give additional proof, that, as a biographer, he suffered a culpable bias to draw him towards favouring the aristocratic party. But though this spirit be conspicuous enough in many instances, yet it must be remarked that his observations on the motives and sentiments of the Gracchi, where there was indeed danger of being misled by prejudice, are delivered with great candour and moderation.

In the course of two well drawn Dialogues concerning the manner of writing history, the

Abbé de Mably advances the questionable position, that the political errors of an historian will not prove extremely dangerous or extremely serious in their consequences, provided that his moral system should be at once irreprehensible and correct; and that however untenable the instances may be, we shall find, by an attentive perusal, that Plutarch himself puts arms into our hands, with which we may contend against his own positions. In some cases the errors of political opinion may pass away inefficient and hurtless, and sometimes the internal contradictions, found in the work itself, will furnish remedies to counteract the influence of prepossession; but when we find the representations of a leading author copied by successive delineators, and his notions adopted by those who only imitate what has gone before them, it can scarcely be thought improper to put the student on his guard, against decisions that may mislead his sentiments and his judgment.

The splendid and eventful histories of Greece and Rome, have supplied classic biography with those shining examples which have continued as models to the artists of succeeding ages. The purposes, disquisitions, and actions, of these powerful and interesting governments, have combined every incitement that could inflame the

imagination, stimulate the feelings, and invigorate the conduct, in those momentous counsels and achievements, in which only elevation and distinctness of character can be indefeasibly established. In the agitation of affairs of the most extended consequence—in the discussion of subjects of the most exalted nature, were formed the bold features, high colourings, and deep shades of character ; constituting that important store of fact and observation, from which are collected the materials, the relations, and the laws, of biographic composition and study.

In the ferment of this combination of energy and talent, sprung up those two great factions, which, with contending powers and violence, so long agitated the most shining periods of classic antiquity. The writers who described, as well as the personages who figured in these great scenes, were, equally, actuated by the spirit of the party, whose cause and principles they adhered to. The accounts of these contentions have been communicated through succeeding times, coloured, no doubt, by the influence of predominating inclination. In the course of such transmissions, men have engaged on different sides of the question ; and have been as pertinacious and intemperate, in the agitation of their opinions, as the immediate actors in the

scene, or the authors who directly recorded them. It is not, therefore, surprising, to find the history and biography of ancient times, though composed by modern hands, ungracefully loaded with invective or defence ; and the volumes of our own language, swelled and deformed by the controversies and commotions of ancient Greece and Rome.

It is not the province of this essay to offer an opinion on the expediency or right, which, originally, or in the course and advancement of things, might belong to either of these two great interests, in the administration of the public weal and government. The object in view is to mark those cases, where the spirit of party has infringed that essential law of biography, which demands the representation of man to be what he actually is, not what he ought to be, or what the writer would chuse him to be, according to the modifications of his own notions and judgment. To delineate with force and truth, the writer must enter intimately into the character he would exhibit—he must, for the time, endeavour to see things in the same point of view, and conceive sentiments of the same nature and feeling. But, whilst he describes with perspicuity, it is not his office to defend what he represents, and change the historian into the apologist,

much less to blacken the party or characters that are found in opposition to the opinions and practices of his hero.

The Life of Cícero, by Middleton, is a work of learning, research, and classic distinction ; but it is a vindication of his cause, and a panegyric of the man, rather than the accurate and impartial description of an individual character. He sets out in his preface with the declaration, that he was previously possessed with a very favourable opinion of Cicero ; and expresses his persuasion, that, “in the case of a shining character, it is more pardonable to exceed in praises of it, than to be reserved, through a fear of being thought too partial.” With such an avowal at the very commencement, we cannot be disappointed in seeing the work carried on under the direction of a preponderating bias ; the immediate narrative, the collateral reflection, and remote citation, all leading towards optimacy and its votaries, and the popular spirit and its vindicators suffering the open or disguised effects of inveterate hostility. So earnest is the adherence of this biographer to the side he has adopted, that its very errors and excesses are defended. Like his hero, he is, on every occasion, the apologist and vindicator of that monster Sylla, as well as of those, of the same party, who

succeeded. In his account of the civil war, even in the article of generalship, he endeavours to extenuate the weak conduct of Pompey ; exalts his most trifling actions, and, evidently, labours to keep out of sight the military skill and active fortitude of Cæsar. More might be adduced to this purpose ; but should there be a wish to pursue the subject further, Tunstall and Bowyer may be consulted, who have expatiated pretty freely on the errors and partialities of this celebrated work. Doctor Warton, too, estimating biography by its value, rather than its bulk, pronounces, that there is a more dispassionate and impartial character of the Orator, in a little piece, " Observations on the Life of Cicero," by Lord Littleton, than in the panegyrical volumes of Doctor Middleton. Bishop Newton accuses him of being sometimes guilty of literary forgery, by additions or omissions, as best suited his purpose : thus proving, from the errors of so eminent a man, that nothing can be more opposite than panegyric and true personal history ; and that it is impossible to give the whole bent of the mind to the vehemence of encomium, without sometimes falling upon the frauds of misrepresentation, and even falsehood.

The incitements to biographical partiality are so various, and the proofs of their prevalence so

numerous, that the observations on this particular part of the subject would be extended to an undue proportion, should the causes of temptation and the frequency of example be carried on much farther. But, as the present essay aims to keep in view the study as well as the composition of biography, it must, in this place, be observed, that for the reception of truth, independence of mind is as requisite to the student as to the writer. If the Biologist (should a distinctive term be allowed) come not to his study with the same spirit of impartiality that is required from the Biographer, the matter exhibited, refracted through the medium of prejudice, will be as much distorted as if it had, originally, been misrepresented by the author. Therefore, on both sides, the obligation is equally binding ; and, to use the words ascribed to Julius Cæsar, by Sallust, "it is our duty to bring to the question a mind free from animosity and friendship ; from anger and compassion. When these emotions prevail, the understanding is clouded, and truth is scarcely perceived. To be passionate and just at the same time, is not in the power of man."

SECT. II. CREDULITY, SCEPTICISM, REDUNDANCIES,
&c.

A disposition to receive all manner of information without distrust, and to adopt it without scruple, must be as injurious to biography, as that suspicious hesitation which questions matters indiscriminately, and doubts even of the most evident. To credulity may be added, a readiness of admitting into the exhibition familiar or low circumstances, which seem to throw no light on the production of biographic truth ; and to scepticism must be joined, the fastidiousness of opinion, that will not receive particulars, which, though apparently vulgar, are yet significant and essential in their application to the development and distinctive peculiarity of character : “ ita et ab instantiis vilibus et sordidis, quandoque, eximia lux et informatio emanat.” *Novum Organum*.

The depravation of biography, at first sight, would appear to be more increased by credulity than by scepticism. Licentious in the reception of matter, the writing will be rich in appearance ; and being, therefore, more entertaining to the reader, will tempt the author to procure notice to his work, rather by the attractions of copious-

ness and variety, than by the strict convincements of accuracy and selection. Every new fact or observation swells the store of real or imaginary acquisition. What is gained with facility, is too pleasing to be scrupulously doubted; and, as Bacon experimentally remarks, there is a peculiar and a constant error in the human mind, of being more moved and excited by affirmatives than negatives.

Modern composition, from a superabundance of materials, and from facility of access to them, frequently suffers more under this redundancy than is perceived in the coherent and individual representations of former times. A conspicuous name, and the delineation of an extraordinary character, in the present day, is often assumed to give the author an opportunity of indulging in remote discussion, and extraneous incident. The rage of accumulating anecdotes gives enjoyment to the collector; and the exhibition gratifies those who look for the reiteration of amusement, but who would feel fatigued by the attention requisite to follow a series of facts and events, collected by patient observation, strung together by the laws of agency and consequence, and by the progressive principles which influence the direction and force of human action.

If the character be a literary one, the temptations for the gathering of anecdotes are multiplied. Every tale, incident, or saying, that can be collected, is seized upon with avidity ; sometimes having relation to, and often totally unconnected with the person, whose memoir is supposed to be before us. Should these extrinsic matters be insipid or tedious, they still abstract attention from the proposed object ; and if they be lively and well told, they transfer the interest from the subject to themselves, and engage the reader in a desultory course of literary gossiping, whilst the essential narration, the promised transactions and character, are passed by and neglected. The instances which might be adduced in corroboration of these remarks are too numerous and glaring to need an exposition ; and the delicacy due to contemporaries from a work, which ventures, with unaffected diffidence, to point out some disadvantages and failures in this species of writing, and, with modesty it is trusted, to suggest a possibility of remedy and improvement, will excuse the omission of what might carry even the appearance of presumptuous animadversion.

Much of this superfluous loquacity is observable in the productions of those who, "in plain simplicity of heart," have given to the public an unrestrained and indiscriminate exposure of

their lives and notions. In most instances, such narrations are swelled with trifling incidents and insignificant remarks ; yet, it must be allowed, that from these very circumstances, unimportant as they may appear, a more accurate knowledge of the subject is frequently derived. Thus the artless disclosures of Lord Herbert, the dreams and omens of Laud, the insipid journal of Ashmole, the quaint sincerity of Lilly and Whiston, and the garrulous digressions of Bishop Newton, though they generally offend the taste, do, by their very minuteness, often give information to the judgment. For, in biography, we not only expect an enumeration of the prominent acts, which, in succession, form the personal history, but also those minor transactions which constitute the character ; always interposing discretion and care, that no trivial circumstances, which do not essentially join in connecting the links of progression, or, by some mode of operation, in casting light on the disposition and conduct of the individual, be admitted to degrade the expression, or interrupt the story.

Critics are, not unfrequently, fastidious in their animadversions on the minuteness of some writers whilst describing the early periods of existence ; but it may be considered, that these apparently slight circumstances are not only indications of

succeeding manners, but are, very often, in themselves, the sources of conduct and consequences, which impress lasting features on the future character. Therefore we do not think that Mr. Meadley gives us trifling or superfluous information—but, on the contrary, we attach much importance to the fact—when, in his biography of Dr. Paley, he mentions the early OLD LOOK impressed upon the countenance of that illustrious man. Many lasting effects, both on study and conduct, have resulted from an early gravity of countenance, as well as from the contrary appearance. A juvenile air will encourage a levity of treatment, which will seldom be offered to maturity and hardiness of aspect : and that mind which goes sturdily forward, as meeting only with respect and attention, would have turned aside or faltered on the way, if treated lightly by familiar folly, or more roughly encountered by boisterous seniority.

A detailing particularity in description brings tediousness and languor :—to be too concise is to be dry and uninteresting. But, whilst remarking on the propensity of loading the page with minute particulars, and on the fastidiousness which rejects essentials because minute, it is proper to observe, that those light circumstances which appear unnecessary or tedious appendages to a

character of the present time, may be received as valuable matter for the investigation of the future student ; and will acquire importance from the remoteness of the period and estimation of the character. The Critical Review, animadverting on Whitelock's Journal of the Swedish Embassy, remarks that "the work, so far as it extends, may be considered as the most copious fund of minute incidents that we meet with in biographical writings. But they are unimportant ;—and, in his life-time, would not be interesting. At this period they derive a degree of veneration, from the distance at which they are placed, and from the integrity of the author." Those circumstances, which may be generally known amongst contemporaries, are not, on that account, to be pretermitted. Posterity will desire to be acquainted with the minutest appearances that have attached to a great character. The familiar habits, the convivial and domestic manners, the times and modes of study, business and enjoyments, the very dress and idle propensities, of such men, are valuable in preservation ; and must not be confounded with those unmeaning and extraneous trifles, liable to the present exception.

Boswell's Life of Dr. Johnson, though reprehensible for its egotism, culpable concealments, and indiscriminate admiration, stands perhaps

foremost, as the most copious mass of biographic matter that has ever been laid open. Like Bale, he professes to record "*acta, dicta, consilia, scripta.*" And, surely, never was exhibited a more full display of peculiar manners, habits, disposition, proceedings, physical qualities and moral government, select sayings and colloquial contests, than are produced in his account of that eminent man. Miss Seward, who intimately knew the characters, both of the hero and of the biographer, advances a heavy charge against the latter, in this celebrated work ; and that charge no less than that "almost every thing is kept back which could give umbrage to Johnson's idolaters, by justly displaying the darker as well as the fairer side of the medal." This omission is certainly culpable ; as by not furnishing the shades as well as the lustre of the picture, we are denied a full and just contemplation of the whole character. But the ample store, collected on this occasion, is displayed with so much ingenuity, the transactions described with so lively a force, and the opinions and sayings of the great moralist delivered with such characteristic semblance, that omissions and little errors are overlooked in the richness and variety of the entertainment. And though, to the critical precision of the present day, many of the articles may appear irrelevant or trivial, and the accumulation of matter rather

exuberant, yet, judging by our own feelings, we may be persuaded, that future readers will not wish that any portion of these "memorabilia" had been omitted; but will receive, with avidity and gratitude, every particle relating to such a personage. What obligations of delight would our predecessors have laid on us, had they been so sedulously partial to their illustrious contemporaries—and what a treasure would have been a life, thus closely written, of the immortal Bacon! We may conclude here with this obvious inference, that a diffuse exhibition of detached circumstances will distract attention, and withhold the mind from the appropriate course of combination; and a too scrupulous exclusion may suffer materials to escape, which are necessary links in the series of purposes, pursuits, and attainments, and which, biographically connected, constitute the action, and form the character of human existence.

SEC. III. UNFAVOURABLE METHOD AND EXECUTION.

When the materials are clear, copious, and genuine, and the mind of the writer well informed and free from prejudice, biography will still fall short of its legitimate aim, if the method of com-

position be not perspicuous and conducive to the purpose.

Plutarch, the great master of the art, has, generally, followed the chronological order ; narrating rather according to the succession of time, than the connection of things : and in this mode he has been followed by the generality of biographers. Suetonius, Melchior Adam, and a few more, have aimed to give a kind of connection and wholeness to actions, by collecting the circumstances under certain general heads. And others have divided their histories by separate accounts of the public and private transactions. Each of these methods, considered singly, may possess peculiar advantages ; yet being followed strictly and exclusively, the limitation will produce deficiency and incoherence.

There can be no distinctness presented, and scarcely the appearance of continuity preserved, by the feeble links of the chronological series. Unity and interest are generally inseparable ;—to fix their mutual impression, leading pursuits or transactions of magnitude might be kept in view to their accomplishment, with little interruption. By continuing a pursuit, passion, or production, as closely as possible, through its rise, progress, and completion,—confusion is avoided.

—curiosity and attention are gratified and engaged—and, as Gibbon says of his method of grouping his pictures by distinct nations, “the seeming neglect of chronological order is compensated by the superior advantage of interest and perspicuity.” So advantageous, and, at times, so indispensable is this principle of connection, that even the professed annalist has found it convenient to break in upon the chronological series, in order to preserve the interest of unity. Thus Tacitus, in his relation of the affairs of Britain, shuts out, for a long period, the co-existing transactions of the rest of the empire: “ne divisa, haud perinde ad memoriam sui valerent.” *Tacit. An. L. xii.*

Following the order of time, day by day, like the journal of a diarist (the routine of common circumstances mixing with the gradual progression of purpose, and broken by the hourly intervention of accident) presents nothing but a chequered display of occasional incident and habitual occurrence; resembling life in the mere glance at appearances, but utterly unlike it in a close view of that seemingly-interrupted, yet *persevering pursuit of objects*, which constitutes the very essence of rational being, and is, indeed, the principle of all voluntary action. Much is certainly due to the minute and laborious annalist,

as a collector of valuable materials, though without arrangement or direction; but for connection and design, for lucid order and accurate classification, we must have recourse to the genius and talents of a different operator.

By advancing so much in favour of connecting particular pursuits or passions, it is not, by any means, intended to lose sight of the advantages of the chronological order, or to shut our eyes to the inconveniencies of collecting dispersed matters into compact and distinct divisions, without having due regard to time and situation. Though history, as in the elaborate work of Dr. Henry, may have attempted such an arrangement on a comprehensive scale, it must not be omitted—and it is the principle scope of this essay to inculcate—that, the leading object of biography should be to hold in view to the student or reader one faithful, perspicuous, and continued **LIFE**. The aim is to recommend a regular and uninterrupted detail of individual action, and a perfect and full delineation of individual character. But, to accomplish this end, it is also submitted to the attention of the biographer, that action should be concatenated, and character developed; that where an interesting process occurs, it should be pursued through the links of purpose, progress, and attainment, shutting out, for

The first term, $\frac{1}{2} \int_{\Omega} |\nabla u|^2 dx$, is the Dirichlet energy of u . The second term, $\int_{\Omega} f u dx$, is the work done by the body force f on the displacement u . The third term, $\frac{1}{2} \int_{\Omega} \lambda (\operatorname{div} u)^2 dx$, is the energy of the volumetric part of the stress. The fourth term, $\int_{\Omega} \mu \operatorname{div} u \operatorname{div} u dx$, is the energy of the deviatoric part of the stress. The fifth term, $\int_{\Omega} \gamma \nabla u \cdot \nabla u dx$, is the energy of the shear part of the stress. The sixth term, $\int_{\Omega} \beta \nabla u \cdot \nabla u dx$, is the energy of the dilatational part of the stress. The seventh term, $\int_{\Omega} \alpha \nabla u \cdot \nabla u dx$, is the energy of the shear part of the stress. The eighth term, $\int_{\Omega} \delta \nabla u \cdot \nabla u dx$, is the energy of the dilatational part of the stress. The ninth term, $\int_{\Omega} \epsilon \nabla u \cdot \nabla u dx$, is the energy of the shear part of the stress. The tenth term, $\int_{\Omega} \zeta \nabla u \cdot \nabla u dx$, is the energy of the dilatational part of the stress.

of the public and the private transactions that occurred ; and some, dwelling only on the former, have consigned the latter to the degraded conveyance of a few scattered notes. In these cases, the main intention of the performance is, an exhibition of the general transactions of a certain period ; and the name of the personage seems to be used, only, as a vehicle for that purpose.

We have already noticed the license of extraneous discussion and display, which has been used by authors in the pretended delineation of literary characters ; how extravagantly they have wandered to collect the matter with which they have loaded and disfigured the biographic pages. The same indiscriminate excess of accumulation has marked, in many instances, the memoirs or histories of those who have figured in a higher sphere. Amongst other examples, the History of Charles the twelfth of Sweden by Voltaire, has, on this ground, met with deserved reprehension. Historical researches foreign to the subject, remote details which have no influence on the points in agitation, and intrusive anticipations which are no way connected with the series of progression, detached observations, and irrelevant remarks—distract the attention of the reader, and cloud the beauties of that celebrated work : for, as the Abbé Mably, with justice, remarks, Voltaire

will suffer nothing to be lost, and throws about, with lavish hand, the whole quantity of his knowledge.

Much useful information, and much desultory entertainment, are sometimes gained from these excursive compositions. But still they cannot afford the profit or the interest resulting from the perusal and study of a piece of comprehensive yet specific biography. In Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*, we have an elaborate collection of such quotations, anecdotes, and imaginative inferences, as may assist us, as far perhaps as is now possible, in forming a judgment on the political, literary, and domestic manners, of that period. Nothing, that research, analogy, or fanciful conjecture can supply, seems to have been omitted by him, which could serve to swell the mighty store of incident, observation, and erudition. But the bulk of extrinsic matter is so disproportionate to the proposed subject of the composition, that "*Miscellaneous Observations on the Contemporaries of Chaucer, and of the Period in which he flourished,*" would be its truest title. For, although this mode of blending the co-existent circumstances and characters with the account of an individual life has been often followed, yet there are degrees at which discretion must stop, and disproportions which may change the very name of the produc-

tion. The Monthly Reviewers, on this very work of Godwin, remark, that "the practice of connecting the history of a particular period with a signal event, or an eminent character, is not novel, though it has recently grown more frequent, and with a disregard to the restrictions, within which the earlier writers confined themselves. They rarely travel out of the sphere which their subjects influenced ; and the best models of later times have respected the same limits ; Middleton, De Sade, L'Infant, Jortin, Roscoe, and others."

In a true delineation and exposure of a man's life, his habits, opinions, and passions, are expected to be laid open ; the motives and objects of his pursuits ; his morals, his situations, and the interesting points of his conduct. When the biographical importance of the individual is preserved through the review of those public transactions with which he is connected, then the author has accomplished the genuine purpose of personal history, and may divide and methodise his work according to his judgment of the dignity of the subject and the nature of the materials. For, however it may appear necessary, at present, to dwell upon these general methods of writing, it must not be forgotten, that the character of the hero will often determine the nature of the composition ; and that

different modes will press upon the discretion of an author, in displaying the lives of philosophers, statesmen, warriors ; men celebrated for any particular qualities or virtues, or men actuated by any remarkable passion. It is, therefore, proper, where the personage is connected with the great or general movements of his contemporaries, that so much should be taken from the mass of public transactions as may be necessary to keep the hero in an obvious state of progression—so much as will form the relation between motives, counsels, pursuits, and objects—or may assist in marking the distinctive line, which separates the public and private character : in all this process, taking especial care to trace every circumstance, every combination, to its relative connection with the immediate subject ; avoiding, as far as possible, any encroachment on the province of general history.

There is also a practice, similar to what has been just remarked, where the writer, having resolved to publish a series of those observations and reflections, which he, at different opportunities, had collected or formed, sets up a name and a meagre narrative, on which to hang his cumbersome garb of unsuitable discussion.

However useful or entertaining these effusions may be, as distinct essays, or remarks on particular

subjects, they are noted here as exceptionable, when viewed as occupying the place of genuine biography : and, in this light, notwithstanding the copious fund of incident, observation, and various literature, with which he has enriched his great work, we must consider the biographical writings of the elaborate Bayle. The outline, which Mr. Bayle exhibits in the text of his dictionary, seldom furnishes the reader with matter on which to form a study of the life, nominally, placed before him. He gives disjointed passages, which seem to be selected more with a view to the indulgence he allows himself in his notes, than as any systematic account of the biographic course of purpose and action, or the reciprocal arrangement of conduct and character. The most important articles of religion, morality, philosophy, and criticism, are treated and controverted with freedom and acuteness. The glosses of friendship and party, the misrepresentations of enmity and prejudice, are exposed and balanced. Shades and lights of conduct are given with unrestrained boldness, and animadverted on with distributive impartiality. Strong touches of character are thrown in with a master's hand, where all before was indistinctness and obscurity. But, though all these may, in some degree, appear to regard the principal figure supposed to be exhibited ;—still wanting the external relations of connection

and sequence, and uninformed by a regulating biographic spirit, they stand detached and disordered, without direction, without adjustment, and no power of attention can combine them into any certainty of concurrent application.

There are other methods adopted by authors, which, in many cases, may be accounted prejudicial to the true object of this kind of writing. In the course of the present essay, when considering biography in its matter, form, and composition, some of these points will be taken up with more attention ;—a brief notice is all that seems necessary in this place.

The omitting altogether, or even the hastily passing over, any period or portion of existence, is certainly detrimental to the study, that aims to comprehend man's life in continuity, and as a whole. From the commencement of existence, the circumstances, which contribute to originate the manners, influence the notions, excite the purposes, and form the peculiar disposition and conduct, have an essential claim to be laid open in a regular, connected order, as a series of objects and principles, on which to found our biographic studies and decisions. Instead of this mode, as in a dramatic or epic production, the hero is frequently presented in full maturity, with little

or no notice taken of those early stages of life, in which the active constitution of mind was formed and determined ; and, in place of the character being considered in its progress and operation, it is viewed only by transient glances, at fixed periods and established situations. *Contemplantur siquidem naturam tantummodo desultoriè et per periodos, et postquam corpora fuerint absoluta ea completa, et non in operatione sua.* Bacon, *Nov. Organ.* See, to this purpose, the whole of Aphorism xli. Lib. II. Examples of this practice are numerous, and do not need insertion.

The important subject of familiar letters, as furnishing biography with some of its most valuable materials, will be duly considered in its place : it is noticed here, as affecting the mode of compiling personal history, by sometimes forming the whole substance of the composition.

Next to the stores of conscious self-disclosure, there can be no richer biographic matter than that gained from letters, if written in a spirit of enlightened confidence, and without any view to future publication. The question which meets us here, is,—whether a copious insertion of letters, to the exclusion of narrative and reflection, be the best mode of furnishing an exact portrait

of human life ; or, whether the author, by a careful study of those letters, and, as the result of that study, by giving us the prominent facts, sentiments, and observations, digested into his own language and mode of representation, do not present the likeness in a more genuine and effective manner ?

The notion of making a person in some measure become his own historian, by a profuse accumulation of his familiar letters, has gained considerable ground in the composition of modern biography. From the favourable example of *Mason's Life of Gray*, and some others of like celebrity, many publications have avowedly been presented, which, with little pretence to narrative, offer us only the portion—and sometimes the partial one—of a limited correspondence. The profitable information to be acquired by biography, from the discreet insertion of applicable letters, can never be disputed :—letters convey, not merely acts, but thoughts and purposes. What we are noting here, as detrimental, is the indiscriminate profusion, the heaping up of letter upon letter, which frequently repeat the same fact, sentiment, and opinion, and, excepting the slight regularity of dates and places, without any succession or coherence.

Prefixed to his Life of Cowper are some excellent "Remarks on epistolary Writers," by Mr. William Hayley. In this essay, the biographer has brought together a fund of ingenious information on the subject ; and, as might be expected, observations abounding in critical research and acute discrimination. But, although his own mode of exhibiting the life of his friend is avowed to be almost exclusively epistolar, we feel a disappointment at his not taking up the subject, with regard to the advantages or detriments which such a practice, when carried so far, may bring on the composition and ultimate design of regular biography. However, in corroboration of the passing hints now offered, we will venture to add the respectable opinion of a critic in the Edinburgh Review, who, in his remarks on Todd's Life of Spencer, observes, that " the biographer should always study to give his work the appearance of continuity. He may, and ought to refer, distinctly, to the sources of his information ; and when there is doubt, the words of the original documents may be subjoined in a note to justify his inference ; but the text ought to be expressed historically, and in the language of the author himself."

Particular modes of composition, with more or less of advantage attending them, will be

adopted by men of different views and talents, and will be suggested by various relations in the condition of the subject. When the materials are competent and conspicuous, the circumstances of the subject and the conception of the author will decide on the manner of exhibition; *finis regit modum*. The powers of arrangement will be adjusted by the susceptibility of the artist; and to give unity and connection to dispersed materials, the writer must be possessed of that genius which can view the many in the one; which can follow a leading principle through all the ramifications of its influence, and perceive the tendency and relations of variety in the union of one comprehensive whole.

We have thus endeavoured to bring before the reader, a summary of those disadvantages, which have appeared as blemishes in biographical writing, either from the nature of the subject, or from the peculiar manner of composition. The first step towards improvement in any pursuit, is to discover the errors and obstacles that stand in the way of advancement; and in such investigation much is required from the operator. To obtain a clear conception of the subject, is the first and surest movement towards gaining the

knowledge of its advantages, and making discovery of its defects. But, in order to appreciate excellence and detect error, the object to be examined should be lifted into the most conspicuous point of view ; its parts should be minutely divided and distinguished ; the bearings and relations attentively investigated ; and the whole accurately surveyed and determined. In this exalted view biography may be considered ;—and such has been the diffident attempt of this examination : in pointing out errors, humbly suggesting possibility of reform ; and, in clearing the way from obstacles and confusion, indicating, with a glow of hope, the rudiments of re-edification and improvement.

Quum enim in hoc primo libro, illud nobis propositum sit, ut tam ad intelligendum, quam ad recipiendum, ea quæ sequuntur. *Bacon, Nov. Organ. Lib. I. Aphorism. cxv.*

ESSAY
ON
BIOGRAPHY.

PART SECOND.

MATERIALS OF BIOGRAPHY, WITH IMPROVEMENTS
SUGGESTED.

CHAP. I.

Requisites and preliminary Studies.

IN entering upon the grateful task of exploring beauties and laying out improvements, it may be proper to repeat, that, in order to advance any work of art to the highest reach, which its nature and our helps will allow, it will be always necessary to place our imaginary model in the most exalted point of view. Though hopeless of attaining the point of perfection in any pursuit or science, it has been recommended, both by the

practice and precept of those who have considered such subjects with experimental attention, to collect from every particular example its most striking advantages, and unite them all, as in the Helen of Zeuxis, into one ideal form. Conceiving (by the same mode of reasoning) the composition of personal history worthy of being considered in a like state of excellence, the requisites and preparations for such an arduous operation will be found commensurate to the pre-eminence of the exemplar. And, though the object may be placed beyond reach, and the requisites beyond attainment, yet, as is effected in other pursuits of art and speculation, every step gained is a fresh acquisition, and new lights are thrown upon science in every degree of advancement.

Under the influence of this impression, we must consider the pre-requisites and introductory studies, necessary to such a lofty aim, to be of no common standard ; and therefore offer what observation, joined with the high sense entertained of the undertaking, seems to demand for this purpose.

To a work, where the principles and passions of the human character are expected to be laid open with liberality and judgment, the first and indispensable requisite is, that the author bear

a mind clearly actuated by the principles and guidance of moral rectitude. Unless the honest glow of probity appear in every part—without the evident conviction that the whole is compiled in the spirit of candour and veracity,—the composition is perused in doubt ; and, losing the confidence which should lead us through our research, we abandon the work, hopeless of acquiring any thing real from our attention, any thing profitable from our application. The writer, then, in the very first instance, is expected to be a man of a sound ethical knowledge and principles, with a mind qualified to discern the existence, and a heart fitted to approve the worth of moral action.

Nor is this high claim lessened by the example of those, who have written with skill and judgment in the different species of history, and yet, whose demeanour in life has not been governed by the strict principles of rectitude. For, it may be observed, that the spirit of morality is so essential to the ostensible purpose of historical delineation, that, even where it has not really existed, the semblance has been assumed, to give colour and currency to a species of writing, which could not be accepted by the public, but under the expectation of being molded by a hand of probity and justice.

Sallust, the historian, amongst other examples, will furnish us with an instance of the constrained respect which is, sometimes, publicly offered to the dignity of virtue, whilst in the intercourse of society, the heart is stained with almost every species of moral turpitude. After having filled the high offices of questor and of consul, the licentiousness and depravity of his life were so notorious, as to call down upon his conduct the disgrace of public and judicial penalty : he was degraded from the honourable rank of senator by the judgment of the censor Appius. Yet, this man of profligacy, this spurner at every law which binds men honestly together, when he meditated the important task of engaging in the composition of history, appreciated with accuracy the indispensable character, which morality must stamp on such an awful undertaking. He, therefore, in his public character of historian, gave to his work the full advantage of moral justice ; painting the scenes of that corruption he was so well acquainted with, in becoming terms of vituperation, and (excepting, perhaps, in the case of Cicero) giving the meed of praise to the honourable transactions of patriotism and virtue.

To this moral disposition should be joined, a native or acquired clearness of intellect ; in order,

that, for the just decisions of the will, genuine materials may be presented by the perspicuity of the understanding. The powers of apprehension should be strong, the imagination vivid, and the attention steady. These are the faculties to attain truth, as the moral ones are those by which it is valued and promulgated. Integrity, feeling, imagination, and judgment, are the grand requisites. A mind unoccupied by prejudice, and a heart untainted by corruption, and both influenced by a quick sensibility of taste and an acute discernment of relations, are in the just state to obtain the object and end of biographical writing; the object being truth, and the end instruction. A man, thus fitted by the qualities of his head and heart, may enter upon the studies, which are still necessary in further preparation for the office of a philosophical biographer.

Whatever man is concerned with, becomes a proper study for the person who proposes to delineate the features of human life. Natural philosophy, in all its varied points of application, will form the basis of these studies. Man's place and condition in the universal scale of things must be regarded, and his general nature developed and determined. The principles of the law of nature and of nations claim a due attention; and the philosophy of the human mind completes the investigation.

The general theory of mankind is the most immediate in its application ; and is as indispensable to biographical composition, as grammar is to language, or anatomy to medical knowledge or to the delineation of the human figure.

In this anatomy we must investigate the arrangement of the bones, muscles, and integuments, which compose the structure ; in this grammar we must decipher the characters and their combinations, which form the language.

Country, sex, temperament, condition, associates, and pursuits, considered generally, with the habits, opinions, principles, and tendencies, effected by them through the different stages of life, are the elements of which the science of universal biography is composed. Advancing from analysis, by induction, the professor assumes a high and dignified station. Applying the philosophy of the intellectual and active powers of man to the varieties of situation and progression of events, on a general scale, principles will be formed, and elements may be extracted ; which, directed to the local condition or given circumstances of an individual character, will not only serve to place it in an adjusted point of view, but may also assist in disclosing the latent and less-obvious working of those springs which set the whole machinery in motion.

The general pursuits and passions, which usually accompany the regular stages of human life, are the first objects of investigation : and from them the inquiry is to be advanced to such as are directed by local state and circumstance. These general as well as distinctive properties, with their mode of operation, are to be ascertained by study and by observation : that is, by the concurrent testimony of those who have written on the intellectual and active powers of man ; and by effective observation on surrounding characters, with a habit of constant application to the internal movements of our own passions and purposes.

In this manner the studies should be advanced from the scientific deduction of books, to practical observations on the living character. The rudiments of intellect, as disclosing themselves in the infant mind, should be minutely marked in their rise, growth, and direction ; and the rude manners of savage life, as presenting man in his native state, without the additions of artificial management, will claim a necessary course of attention. But, above all, frequent recurrence should be made to the conceptions and active operations of our own minds. And, in aid of this internal contemplation, minute journals of opinions and actions may be recommended, as offering useful assistance ; not merely ephemerides of passing

transactions, or such as may be supposed liable to the perusal of another,—but a secret and faithful transcript of thoughts, feelings, and purposes, designed to be used as an instrument, in applying our own convictions to the apparent motives and pursuits of others ;—and, again, (after making the due exclusions indicated by character and condition) in trying external appearances by the test of our own self-examination.

From the stores of this comprehensive study might be constructed, an admissible theory of mankind, so well digested, and so orderly arranged, as to bear immediate application to particular cases when they occur. By this it is not meant to be understood, that our faith is to be rivetted on any hypothesis, however recommended or obtained ; but by having a well disposed system, obvious and fit to be applied to every period and circumstance occurring in our studies, facts and observations will fall into a regular order. These applications will correct and improve our theory ; and theory, thus adjusted, will, in return, light us through those latent operations of the mind, which give life and distinctness to the character.

Thus prepared by general science, the biologist will now have to enter upon the more interesting and regular study of individual life. Here, by a

new analysis, the particular character is to be penetrated, divided, and arranged. From a careful examination of facts, and an accurate comparison of relations, matter will arise for induction; and principles will be discovered, regulating, not only the case before us, but such as may assist in the investigation of subjects having a similar tendency. And, in this place, humbly imitating the practice of our great master, Lord Verulam, whom we, respectfully, aim to follow through the course of this attempt, we shall offer the outlines of a few synoptical examples. Not presented in confidence, as finished systems for the student to work by; but, as illustrating our method; and as a faint example of what may be done by those, who, with happier opportunity and talents, may, hereafter, give their attention to the inductive mode of biographic study.

In generalizing from individual life, whether we pursue our studies through the incidents, as they occur in chronological succession—or take the leading pursuits, or some particular passion, as the subject of investigation, our induction can never be genuine if confined to the materials furnished by that single object. The first table of generalization, drawn from the current facts, must be compared with other facts of a resembling

nature,—and with other tables, arranged and classified from cases, where the situations and circumstances have such an analogy as to bear the application. Where the main pursuit of each has been similar, we must compare one life with another. We must compare the leading passion of one man with the same passion, as modified by the peculiar disposition and circumstances of another; and we must still further extend the result of this comparison to other analogous cases within the extent of our researches, before we can rest in the hope of having gained such principles, as may be applied with a degree of confidence to more general practice.

If, for example, the character of Julius Cæsar were to be adopted as a study of this description;—however copious the materials offered by history for the purpose intended, we could not depend upon any general deduction, though drawn from the prominencies of such a life as his, without comparing them with inferences collected from the lives of others, who have been actuated by similar passions and purposes. It must be allowed, that the course and designation of action cannot be identically alike in the different subjects which may be collected for such a study; but when the objects, in a general sense, are nearly

the same, the means of advancement consequentially similar, and the powers of the separate agents proportionably adapted to the accomplishment of their purposes—then, beside the distinctive lights, which may be thrown on the individual characters in the progress of the comparison, much general matter will be elicited, applying to them all ; as well as to others, who, even in a weaker degree, are incited to the same pursuits and objects.

The life of Julius Cæsar, considered according to its importance, is still a desideratum. The materials, however, to be deduced from his own Commentaries, from the Epistles and Orations of Cicero, from Appian, from Suetonius, Plutarch, Florus, and others of the ancients, who have directly or occasionally recorded and illustrated the acts and views of that extraordinary man, are ample for the student. The AMBITION, then, of Cæsar, in some of the points of its commencement and process, is proposed as the instance of our experiment. The characters of Mahomet, of Cromwell, and of Kouli-Khan, may form the parallel studies : and to these should be added others, who, though not acting exactly in the same circumstances, may yet afford essential matter for comparison and deduction.

It is scarcely necessary to advance, upon the present occasion, that, in the course of this biographical survey, there is no aim of bringing the justice or culpability of Cæsar's conduct into the question ; much less to offer these studies on his pursuit of power, as maxims for attaining the objects of a criminal ambition. The thing intended is merely the example of an exercise, however imperfect and unfinished, which, by inferring observations and principles from a connected process of advancement towards one object, may suggest the practicability of applying the helps of analogy to other cases, where the degrees and points of progression have not been so conspicuous.

The table offered, will be constructed of observations immediately drawn from facts, and will have relation more to the actuality of operation than the abstractions of intellect. But tables of this degree, compared with others of the same class, may, after scrupulous exclusion and accurate arrangement, lead to a higher series of comprehensive principles ; such as may embrace other pursuits, and apply, on a more general scale, to other passions and other cases of voluntary determination.

TABLE OF THE SECOND ORDER. *

“ Etiam dubitabit quispiam potius quam ob-
jiciet, utrum nos de naturali tantum philosophiâ,
an enim de scientiis reliquis, Logicis, Ethicis, Po-
liticis, secundum viam nostram perficiendis lo-
quamur. At nos certé de universis hæc, quæ
dicta sunt, intelligimus : atque quemadmodum
vulgaris Logica, quæ regit res per Syllogismum,
non tantum ad naturales, sed ad *omnes* scientias
pertinet, ita et nostra, quæ procedit per INDUC-
TIONEM, OMNIA complectunt. Tam enim Histo-
riam et TABULAS inveniendi conficimus de Ira,
Metu, et Verecundiâ, et similibus ; ac etiam de
exemplis rerum Civilium : &c.”

Verulam. Nov. Organ. Lib. I. Aph. 127.

PURSUIT—SUPREME POWER.

1. A certain degree of fermentation assists in
producing an ardent spirit : in the heat of public
commotion is engendered the rage of ambition.

* What we would call Tables of the *first* order, must be formed by
an arrangement of Facts, either as they occurred in the succession of
time, or disposed according to the regular advancement of a certain pur-
pose. It did not appear necessary to give an example of what is so
clear and accessible to the diligence that may incline to the analytical
mode of investigation.

2. Without the supply of talent, ambition is impotent ; without opportunity, useless.

3. Youthful ambition may be excited in consequence of conjectural prediction of future excellence or high destination ; the time, place, and personage pronouncing,—all giving influence to the impression.

4. Early danger teacheth prudence, without extinguishing hope ; and, sometimes,

“ Lowliness is young ambition’s ladder.”

5. The instruments of advancement are rendered effective—the great men by interest and intrigue ; the soldiers by valour and munificence ; and the people by splendour and condescension.

6. When there are divisions in a state, decision, in embracing one party, condenses the means of advancement, and points the energies to a determinate process.

7. The influence of a party is concentrated in the leader : the chief of a weak faction is before the subaltern or equal member of a powerful combination.

8. An early act of invincible resolution not only establishes fortitude in the agent himself, but disposes others to confidence in his future stability. The proofs of an innate and determined magnanimity cannot appear too soon ; and a party will give its whole trust and powers to a man who is not to be turned from the cause by interest or danger.

9. The existence of party is identified with the success of the leader ; and to his fortune the hopes and destinies of the whole must be indissolubly chained.

10. Affording open protection and encouragement to the injured and to the discontented, substantiates the power that is assumed, and converts semblance into reality.

11. In a popular career, the display of virtues is as necessary as the actual possession.

12. Public estimation is the support of power ; and can never be preserved without the most evident observance of the rites and ordinances of national religion.

13. Whilst designs are silently advancing, suspicion is lulled by the plausible semblance of contradictory manners.

14. Precipitation is injurious, provided the machine do not stand still or retrograde : that time is not lost, which gives strength to the power, addition to the means, and facility to the progression.

15. To a mind of energy, the failure in any subordinate attempt is but a stimulus to superior achievements. Proceed or perish !

16. The course once begun, popular attention is fixed—no chasm, no remission—all is dazzling, successful progression.

17. Offices, or public stations, carry in themselves a character of power and privilege, which is always added to the native worth and influence of the possessor.

18. Specious and shewy allurements bend before the sagacious appreciation of solid advantage.

19. In comparative or conjunct transactions, all reputation is monopolized by the superiority that overbears every appearance of successful participation.

20. Successes, in the same scenes and exploits, where others have toiled to obtain a celebrity,

are made light of,—in order to enhance the value of the agent's more important achievements.

21. With adversaries, hope is never to be extinguished : success is then viewed without horror, and an opening still left to reconciliation.

22. In many cases, it is as necessary to wink at the errors of friends, as it is convenient to expose as well as profit by the defects of opponents.

23. The interest of rivals may be promoted, when their success gives facility to the scheme in hand; and the innovations of others are supported, when they may stand as precedents to be taken advantage of on future occasions.

24. The allurements of love, and the avengement of injuries, are powerful but not invincible temptations : affection and resentment are the two greatest sacrifices that can be immolated on the altar of ambition.

25. Money, the sinews of political as well as military operations, if levied by foreign warfare, will effect a double advantage—reputation in the acquisition, and power in the disposal.

26. Favourable occasions are fleeting ; vigilance seizes upon, and makes them instrumental : the neglect of one opportunity may put to hazard a whole plan of action.

27. Common forms and usages sink before power and resolution.

28. The confidence of possessing a power to infuse heroism, and even abilities, into the souls of others, returns, with added energy, upon the agent, and renders the combination invincible.

29. The end being ever in view, the intermediate achievements will partake of the nature of the object ; but detain attention only as means to the ultimate accomplishment.

30. When the inevitable moment, at last, demands the master-resolution,——silence precedes the blow——no preparatory signs give time to apprehension or resistance. The leader's spirit is imparted in the surprise and grandeur of the stroke ; thought is overwhelmed in admiration ; ——and suddenness becomes the soul that animates decision.

It will appear that this table, as far as it goes, is formed by an orderly series of remarks, founded on a certain course of action towards the attainment of a determinate object ; having the terms generalized in such a manner as to bear a more apposite comparison with other tables of a similar construction. The example chosen, too, has some advantage, under the notion that the process of action was carried on in a systematic way, by a person, who, not only had laid his design with precision as to its end, but who possessed also that decisive inflexibility of spirit, which could not be forced out of its direction, by any thing foreign to the means fitted for the accomplishment of his purpose. In the case of ordinary men, as Doctor Adam Ferguson acutely observes, “ we may err in imputing too much to design or concert ; but, with respect to Cæsar, the mistake to be feared is, not perceiving the whole extent of his foresight and plan ” :—a plan, we may add, long meditated, and of which the indications were early discerned by the penetration of Sylla, as well as by the suspicious and inimical vigilance of Cato.

The method, thus submitted, as approaching to the inductive, may be extended with advantage to other pursuits—to any course of action, directed to the attainment of a precise object ; to in-

stances, moral, social, political, or scientific ; or to any pursuit which must be necessarily carried on by certain means, regular, dependent, and adapted to the intention. Subjects for this purpose being adopted, it becomes necessary that characters should be selected of those personages who have been successful in their career, or who, at least, have evidently proceeded in a systematic way towards the accomplishment of a purpose.

Of these examples, the greater the variety collected, and the more strictly the measure of comparison has been carried on, the higher will be our expectations of educing principles of a wider import, and inferences capable of a more general application. For, (according to the remark of a respectable Critic) "in an inductive process, it is surely desirable to have as great a variety of experiments as possible ; and our confidence, in the results at which we arrive, will be the greater, when we find them verified in all those arts, which bear a manifest relation to each other."²²*

It will here be of importance to recollect, that, in the task of exploring the features of a character thus chosen, it is taken for granted, that, as far

* Edinburgh Review : Vol. VII. p. 297.

as the common interest, usually excited by works of biography, extends, our curiosity has been fully saturated ; and that we advance to the subject with the dispassionate, steady eye of the artist, who, without being affected by novelty or by predilection, prepares to enrich his practical studies of the passions, from the expressive lineaments of one characteristic likeness, which is to be compared afterwards with other models of a similar class or conformity. With this view, and in this spirit must be followed the course of investigation in one determinate character, in order to place the observations, thus gained, by the side of those elicited from the like examination of another. Thus the means and degrees of advancement being noted, and viewed in conjunction with those obtained from instances found in a like, or somewhat analogous course of progression, appropriate tables may be formed ; and these being brought to comparative inspection with others drawn from various and even dissimilar pursuits, generalization may be extended so far as to supply a set of aphorisms or principles, having relation to the pursuit and attainment of even an indefinite object ;—that is, an End, generally, without any specific distinction.

As the consideration of this mode of analysis will come before us again, we may rest, at present,

in this conclusion, that, an ample contemplation of the general nature of things is necessary to make us understand an individual subject as we ought. “*Nemo enim alicujus rei naturam in ipsâ re feliciter perscrutatur ; sed amplianda est inquisitio ad magis communia.*”*

According to the opinion entertained of the importance of the subject, the requisites and attainments expected from a biographical writer have been rated at no ordinary estimation. Consistently, then, with this persuasion, it will be useful to gather advantages from every species of literature, that can throw light upon the main object, or prove auxiliary in our advances towards it.

After the mind has been prepared and possessed by a sufficient store of biographic reading, amongst the further helps that may be acquired to increase the general knowledge of the human character, and to follow, with distinct footsteps, the various pursuits of our busy species, there, perhaps, cannot be found a study more conducive to the purpose than the Drama ; especially that exquisite portion of it, constructed and animated by the genius of our immortal Shakspeare.

* Bacon : Nov. Org. Lib. I. Aph. 70.

Second only to the living display of manners, situation, and conduct, it exhibits, in a connected and verisimilar progression, the affections and pursuits of man, as they are stimulated by extraordinary objects, and actuated by the impulse of vehement passions. Every stage of the process is discerned without perplexity ; designs are carried on exposed and fearless ; and secrecy itself appears without disguise. The temptations and motives which impelled the different agents, the obstructions they had to struggle with, the advantages they laid hold on, the influence of their moral character on the means they adopted, their whole biographic passage, from the moment the poet has placed them in action before us, until their career of good or evil be terminated in success or disappointment——these are all exhibited in such an orderly series of cause and effect, that the ingenuity of the artist is scarcely regarded, and fiction seems to be lost in the consonance of the representation with the reality of nature.

The whole scope of this treatise being considered in the light of an introductory essay towards the composition and study of biography, we may find it suitable, for the present, to close this discussion on the subject of preliminary acquisitions. But, in concluding, it may not be redundant to recommend, as an essential portion

of this preparatory discipline, a due and studious consideration of the various passions incident to human life, and decisive of the human character. To be effectual, the study should be pursued with attentive regard and systematic regularity. The nature, rise, object, and operation of each, should be minutely investigated. The relations which subsist between them, their affinities, mixture, contrarieties, and the general effects resulting from such combinations, should be distinguished, fixed, and treasured up as a valuable store for further use and application.*

Any particular disquisition on this subject, though not foreign to our purpose, would be disproportionate to the concise arrangement intended in this essay; nor will it appear indispensable, when we reflect how many ingenious and profound dissertations on the appetites, passions, emotions, and affections, have been presented to the literary world, especially by the philosophers of our own country. The researches, disclosures, and classifications, which modern investigation has diffused over the elaborated pages of Hutche-

* To understand this political system of the passions, we must study their play, their motions, their progress, and each of their peculiar characters. We must learn how they unite together; how, mutually, they assist each other; how they intermingle; how, in some measure, they avail themselves of their respective workings; and how, at times, they lie concealed, in order to burst forth with a redoubled vigour.

Abbe de Mably—on the Manner of writing History.

son, Hartley, Watts, Hume, Kaimes, Reid, Cogan, and other distinguished writers, will give ample exercise to the student's inquiry into these ruling properties of our common constitution : and, however these eminent men may differ in the application of terms, or in theoretical arrangement, enough will be obtained to establish the interesting nature of the research ; and to prove, how necessary such examination is to him, who would either study or delineate the movements, bearings, and complexities of the human character.

Nor let it be objected, that the preparatory studies, thus suggested, are prolix or operose. The meanest of the arts has its elements of introduction ; and every science has its constituent principles. Shall, then, a species of writing, which combines in itself, or is intimately connected with, every science, that has for its subject man, in his most comprehensive relations, mental and active, be attempted without initiatory rudiment, or actual qualification ?——From one, so advancing, to this important task, without a full apprehension of its tendency and magnitude, we should not be inclined to challenge less than what Socrates demanded from the Athenian youth, who, without the necessary requisites and preparation, aspired to be a statesman.

From what has been thus advanced, our readers will perceive, that the studies, here recommended, are chiefly such as relate to a patient and minute examination of particular and individual objects; and which, from such a survey, widely extended, may rise to those grand and uniform principles that determine the general laws, and constitute the specific nature of the whole class. The conceptions thus exalted and enlarged, and the variety of individual nature methodised and digested into a common canon of general application, it may be expected that the biographer will come down to his immediate design, and the student to his selected subject of attention, divested of the narrowness of local or temporary prejudice; and, enlightened by universal principles, will be enabled to mark with precision, deviations from the genuine form, and judge of the tendency of particular appearances, from an acquaintance with the paramount laws which govern the general directions of the species. In this way we may venture to hope, that the attentive study of particular forms may lead to a practical knowledge of the general system; and, that the lights of this comprehensive philosophy may, in return, disclose to us "the finer shades of manners, from which actions and characters of the same class derive difference and individuality."^{*}

^{*} Encyclop. Edin. Article BIOGRAPHY.

CHAP. II.

Biographical Spirit.

Per hoc (quantum conditio humanitatis ac mortalitatis patitur) exaltetur intellectus, et facultate amplificetur ad naturæ ardua et obscura superanda.

Bacon, in Distributione Operis.

By an inherent law of our nature, founded on the principles of sympathy and imitation, the plain and precise outline of an individual life will give satisfaction to the most ordinary spectator. But when a full representation, corrected by skill in the principles of the art, and finished by the delicate touch of sensibility, is offered to the inspection of a kindred and scientific observer, a different and more exquisite sentiment is produced. The combination of accuracy, feeling, and science, which pervades the exhibition of the artist, is communicated to the susceptibility of the student; and in the appreciation and enjoyment of this communion of intellect, may be discerned the agency of a powerful principle, at which we have already taken a transient glance, and on which we are now to extend our observations.

That the conceptions entertained on this subject may not be confounded with ideas of another class, or placed among the metaphysical coinages of abstraction, it will be found useful to express, under what modifications of form we conceive the effects of this principle may be discovered, and what is the nature of its operation. Like the spirit of animation, its effects are various. Among other manifestations, however, it may be sensibly recognised, when there is brought before us a lively description of appearances, indicating, at the same time, accurately, but not obtrusively, the laws by which these appearances are shaped and governed; sometimes in an interesting, continued series of action; sometimes in delicate circumstances of situation and sentiment; but, most of all, in those eventful occurrences, where the soul appears through the action, and character is developed at a single stroke;—not exactly the sublime of rhetoricians, but always resembling it, in exciting an emotion in the reader, proportionate to that which animates the sensibility and expression of the author.

Thus, assuming from the experience of our own observations, and from the express or incidental testimony of others, the existence of this peculiar spirit, it seems to remain that we should give some attention to its generation and growth; to the means by which it is exalted, to the dispo-

sitions best fitted for its reception and communication, and to the helps it may afford, in exploring and disclosing those shining instances of man's life, always illustrating, and frequently deciding, the very substance and form which constitute the character.

Man, pursuing his objects, encountering dangers, overcoming difficulties, employed in acts of magnanimity and benevolence, glowing with elevated sentiments, or actuated by designs of splendour and importance—man, thus highly engaged, cannot be contemplated, without communicating to the observer, a portion of that spirit which guides and animates him in the conflict.

The nature and measure of the sympathy, thus formed, will be according to the force impressed, and the emotion excited. By reiterated exercise, this disposition, like the faculty of taste in the fine arts, will pass into a promptitude of conception, sensibly alive to every indication of those movements that notify and educe the principles of moral action. To give it efficacy it must be loved; to render it permanent it must be improved and exercised.

The operative effect of this animating spirit on the powers of the biographical delineator, and

of the enthusiasm of the writer on the sensibility of the reader, is most beautifully and expressively depicted by one of our literary journalists. "Im-pressed deeply with her subject, Mad. de B. displays an uncommon degree of animation in her descriptions; and while perusing them, the sentiments of the hero seem to beat in our bosoms, his enterprising spirit pervades our frame, we bear him company in his daring exploits, we overcome difficulties, we brave dangers, we endure privations, we are cool and collected in emergencies the most critical; and like him, we are alive only to honour, fame, and duty; we share the conscious merit, which, on the return of peace, cheers his breast; we participate in the considerations and distinctions which await him, and we taste the enjoyments and felicities, which solaced the long evening of his life."*

It is not in the mere technical practice of an art or profession, that an exquisite relish of its perfections, or an intuitive perception of its principles can be acquired. A well-grounded knowledge of the nature and properties of the science, the elements of which it is formed, their combination and specific directions, and a thorough acquaintance with the general laws by which the

* In Madame de Blumenthal's Life of General de Zieten; Monthly Review: Vol. XLVI. p. 150.

whole is governed, can only, in the process of such acquisition, imbue the mind with a portion of that enthusiasm, which is the subject of our contemplation. In painting, the connoisseur, who is perfectly versed in the theory of invention, composition, perspective, chiaro-oscuro, &c.—and in music, the true judge of the principles of melody, modulation, harmony, time, and other divisions of that charming science, as if possessed of a different sense, will feel more exalted gratification in considering the higher works of the respective arts, than even the professional painter or musician, who is not in possession of this previous knowledge. “*Quam multa vident pictores in umbris et eminentiis, quæ nos non videmus? Quam multa, quæ nos fugiunt in cantu, exaudiunt in eo genere exercitati.*” *Cic. Tusc. Quest.*

It will be seen, then, that this biographical spirit is not represented as a matter that comes at once upon the mind like a gift of inspiration. It can be only acquired by patient study and habitual reflection, and by the facility and affection generated in the process. The principles, the divisions, and the relative connections of general biography, must be made so intimately our own, that they may be applied without effort to every occasion and case that offers. In the commencement of the study, they must be ever present, and continually

brought to bear upon the subjects of observation ; until, by a perseverance in the practice, they will insensibly unite with the other mental acquisitions and faculties ; and, when forgotten in their terms, like the rules of grammar and logic, will, silently, modify and direct the acuteness of our conceptions and researches.

Improved by, at least, some of the preparatory studies recommended in the present essay, the person, in search of this biographic light, might find some profit in exercises like the following.— Let an elaborate piece of biography be taken as the subject to work upon. Let it be explored in successive perusals, until novelty, curiosity, and entertainment, be fully gratified. In this state, entering, once more, upon a course of examination, the student, perhaps, will feel some degree of pleasing surprise, to find with what a force of moral evidence, the concatenation of events, the distinctness of purpose, and the full-formed character of the personage, are impressed upon his mind ; how, in the commencement of life, he perceives the future man, and how, in maturity, he recognises the strengthened habits and propensities of infancy and youth ; how, in events, he can trace the causes which preceded them, and from inceptions, the train of consequences which necessarily evolved ; how apparent chasms are

filled up ; how seeming incongruities are reconciled ; and with what success complicated circumstances may be disentangled. In this apprehension of progressive agency and luminous arrangement, the soul expands with the enlargement of its views, and the mind feels a glow of sensibility, at the moral value of its discoveries. To apply known appearances to the detection of less-obvious tendencies, to combine the general manners into distinct features of character, and to infer from the past modes of action, the nature and indications of the future—in such a process, the intellectual powers have their most exquisite exercise, and philosophic curiosity* has its highest gratification.

As in new countries, and first interviews with passing characters, transitory emotions arise from the impression of novelty, which for a time unfits the mind for distinctive observation ; so it is in unmethodised, desultory, biographic reading ; transactions and persons are passed over in quick succession, dazzling by their strangeness

* "There is a passion of the mind,—the strength of which is usually commensurate with the progress of our knowledge of human nature—which delights to observe the manners ; to investigate the symptoms of character ; to infer, from the occasional actions of an individual, the predisposing bent or state of his mind ; or, from a preconceived idea of his turn and disposition, to infer his probable conduct in given circumstances, and to compare with these inferences the actual result ;—a philosophic passion, which might be named the *ETHIC CURIOSITY*."—*Monthly Review on "a Commentary illustrating the Poetics of Aristotle, by Henry James Pye, Esq. October, 1795.*

and producing neither interest nor discrimination. But, on the contrary, the genuine biographic spirit, operating on a judgment conversant in the course of human action and the principles of human conduct, will unite itself intimately with the objects of contemplation; will appreciate without wonder, and classify without confusion, the circumstances presented,—however made prominent by local position, or however seemingly indistinct from the glare of occasional novelty.

Thus, though in the beginning, erroneous judgments may be formed, and conjecture sometimes take the place of certainty, yet will the mind, habitually bent on the actions of men, with a view to their causes, succession, and consequences, give employment to the powers of investigation; and the study of each new case will correct or strengthen that which went before, so that every fresh series of observations will add to the acuteness and perspicuity of the practice. From a regulated and persevering attention to one object, or one set of objects, the faculties employed may be so improved, and gain such facility in the exercise, that, as the object becomes more known in its parts and relations, so may the faculties, by the readiness and certainty of their application, acquire a peculiar sensibility of disposition towards such studies and objects.

The laws and properties of one art frequently illustrate the principles and practice of another ; and didactic writers do not hesitate to make use of such allusions when suitable to their purpose. In the course of this inquiry, we frequently avail ourselves of the analogy we conceive to subsist between the representation of the life of man by biographical delineation, and the exhibition of the human countenance, or other forms, by material painting. In order to enhance the utility of this habitual attention to the study of man, deemed so essential to our purpose, some reflective advantage may be derived from the illustration of this kindred art. A passage, in the Introduction to Anson's Voyage round the World, seems perfectly applicable to the point in hand,—to the practice so much recommended.

“ Besides other uses of drawing, it adds strength and distinguishing power to some of our faculties. Those who are used to draw objects, observe them with more accuracy than others who are not habituated to that practice. We may easily see, that when we view any object, however simple, our attention or memory is scarcely ever so strong, as to enable us, when we have turned our eyes away from it, to recollect exactly every part it consisted of, and to recall all the circumstances of its appearance ; but he that is

accustomed to draw what he sees, is, at the same time, accustomed to rectify this inattention: for by confronting his ideas copied on the paper, with the object, he finds out what circumstances deceived him in appearance; and hence he at length acquires the habit of observing much more at one view, and retains what he sees with more correctness, than he could ever have done without his practice and proficiency in drawing."

Through the whole of these observations it will be perceived, that the condition of mind we are exploring is not to be expected as the result of abstract refinement or solitary reflection. We seek for it only in the practical operations of active life, or in the genuine representation that exhibits these transactions. Though, in the extensive studies recommended, truths of wider application will arise, yet they must be deduced from pure perception, and precise observation on the objects immediately before us. For, however we may, in extended application, convert sentiment into principle, we must remember, its existence is derived from actual feeling, its very generalities must arise from evident facts.

It is thus that in the contemplation of special instances, and of the effective inferences they offer to view, this intellectual and moral propen-

city is best nurtured and exercised. The minute incidents which engender habits and produce effects will be dwelt on and tracked, from their rise and direction to their consequences, with attention and delight. The same circumstances acting upon different minds, or dissimilar circumstances operating on minds of the same apparent designation, with all their attendant varieties, combinations, and deductions, will give ample scope for pleasurable and scientific penetration. The comparative effects of local manners and relative condition will be traced with equal avidity, as always influencing, and sometimes forming the very nature and character of the subject.

The extraordinary endowments of Boerhaave, at an early age, will lead the earnest investigator to examine, link by link, the whole series of excitements, helps, and acquirements, which, at such a period, effected so uncommon an accumulation of excellence. The example, the vigilance, and the judicious methods, made use of by his father, will be found to have generated that choice, that attention, and that orderly application, which accompanied all the stages of his advancement, and which tempered all the proceedings and future attainments of that truly great and amiable character. As a contrast to this exhibition, but still with a view to our method,

we behold Swift, after four years standing, refused his bachelor's degree at the university of Dublin for insufficiency. In looking back to the process of his education, we find no affectionate parent stimulating his genius, or assisting his studies. We perceive his tender years surrounded by the vulgar relatives and associates of a hireling nurse. Deprived of the sympathetic charities of home and parental regard, at six years of age, he is placed at a country school, and at fourteen removed to the university. With these early disadvantages, shackled by dependence, soured by disappointment, and depressed by poverty, can we be surprised to see his studies ill-directed, his dispositions morose, and his conduct untractable? And, even, when by dint of self-reliance, and the unbending spirit of determinate ambition, he escaped from the actual misery of these early humiliations,—when, by native judgment, and a demeanour of affected or real arrogance, which wrought to his purpose, he seated himself among the higher candidates for that power his proud heart aspired to—even then, the investigating spirit of biography will still find the unpropitious impressions of his youth tainting and disturbing his actions and his writings; not merely the course of his ordinary conduct and temporary effusions, but, also, the tenour of his more important transactions and more finished performances; all

bearing the evident marks of disgust, untractableness, indignation, and misanthropy.

These notices and remarks are suggested, as tending to furnish means by which this principle may be awakened and strengthened. Minute observations on the unfoldings (both in ourselves and others) of those springs which stimulate to action, and of those actions which are the sources of other changes and directions, will beget that lively and comprehensive attention, which, from exercise and skill, takes the form of inclination. "The more lively our ideas are, the more they are accompanied with this agreeable emotion, in which admiration consists. But the more attention we render ourselves, the more lively are our ideas."*

By dwelling so much on the effects of the assiduous discipline, thus recommended, it is not meant to be said, that the practice will totally supply the place of a natural tendency to this kind of moral participation. Men of true sensibility, accustomed to look with more sympathetic ardour on the actions of men, do not think differently from others ; but they perceive with more acuteness, and are enabled, with more distinctness

* Crousaz : Art of Thinking.

and animation, to delineate the scenes and operations they have so ardently contemplated. The principle of this spirit is generated in sympathy, and nursed by practice. The love that is contracted by the process dwells with fondness on the object of its attention, and discovers traces of beauty and importance, which would have no existence to the frigid observation of others : for, as it has been said, that there may be faculties in the human mind not yet brought into action, for want of meeting with proper objects to excite them ; so there are many essential circumstances and attributes, belonging to objects, yet undiscoverable by those who have not the corresponding aptitude of faculties to perceive them.

The greater the degree of interest taken in the circumstances and transactions under consideration, the more vivid will be the conception—the more forcible the representation. The more the writer assimilates himself with, and enters into, the condition of his hero, and the spirit of the times, the more shall the reader sympathise in the reality of the impression. Among the historians of antiquity, we find what lively effects have been produced by the writings of those great men, whose imaginations and sensibility were exalted to the highest state, by being absolutely actors in many of the scenes they describe. Thucydides,

Xenophon, Polybius, Cæsar, Sallust, and Tacitus, fresh from the field or senate, and impressed with the reality and importance of the subject, from positive experience, could not but bring to the composition before them, that solid portion of interest, that intimate union with the subject and its circumstances, which,—at least, with regard to the effects of this vivid force of intellectual and moral spirit,—have fixed them the admiration and the models of grateful posterity.

The spirit of this personal interest can neither be excited nor exerted in desultory acts or indiscriminate observation. The study must be permanent and appropriate : it must be directed with earnestness and sensibility, till the frame and temper of the mind become so truly biographical, that it will be disposed to transform itself with facility into the very character it holds in contemplation.

This lively personification, being principally carried on by the habitual and precise application of known principles to individual cases, will lead the imagination through all the recesses of motives, objects, pursuits, and consequences ; and, being, in no small degree, actuated by the very spirit of the character in view, will, almost intuitively, develope causes, trace effects, detect

opinions, and decide upon principles of conduct which have hardly been expressed or glanced at, in the documents collected or presented to the writer or the student.

In this effort, the assumption of character must be complete. Our own state and peculiar opinions must, for the moment, be abandoned, and the condition of the character, we wish to conceive or represent, wholly engage us;—*totus in hoc*. Such a force of imagination is to be acquired, that we are to see, not with our own, but with our hero's eyes, and feel only with his faculties; we must contract his habits, adopt his manners, assume his sentiments, invest ourselves with his partialities and his humours; be actuated by his motives, guided by his designs, and elated by his attainments. In short, the connection and dependence of his character is to be followed, entirely in his person, though its moral view and consistency be appreciated in our own. For, it may be remarked here, in following the life of a man, we must never lose sight of some end; which, whether clearly defined, or but dimly seen, whether receding or constant, fluctuating, or even changing, it is still his destiny to pursue, and our duty to investigate.

It is impossible to judge of the effects of objects and circumstances on the person, whose life and opinions we are considering, without the intermediate operation of our own sympathy. This alone, it is, which places us, according to the measure of our feeling, and exercise in this practice, in his very situation ; and gives us, from the personating sensibility of our own hearts, the only possible way of conceiving how *his* may be affected.

As, in the course of this treatise, we have been free in introducing the sentiments of eminent writers, when they seemed to strengthen or illustrate our positions,—on the present occasion, we feel gratified in offering the high authority of a philosophical biographer, professor Dugald Stewart ;—who, in the view he takes of Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, expresses himself to this effect.—

“ It is from our own experience alone that we can form any idea of what passes in the mind of another person on any particular occasion ; and the only way in which we can form this idea, is by supposing ourselves in the same circumstances with him, and conceiving how we should be affected, if we were so situated. It is impossible for us, however, to conceive ourselves placed in

any situation, whether agreeable or otherwise, without feeling an effect of the same kind with what would be produced by the situation itself; and, of consequence, the attention we give at any time to the circumstances of our neighbour, must affect us somewhat in the same manner, although by no means in the same degree, as if the circumstances were our own."*

In the putting ourselves, mentally, in the situation of others, in order to appreciate and possess ourselves of their views, and their feelings, no little effort must be used to exalt or inflame our imagination to the absolute condition of enjoyment, suffering, or exertion, by which the personage is actuated. The placid routine of general life will afford us no conception of the energies and the depressions with which human nature has been, at times, affected. No common set of feelings will transport us to the presence of the battle's carnage, to a fellowship with the insatiable aspirations of ambition, to the sordid cells of avarice, to the miserable retreats of sorrow and despair.

Attention to objects and circumstances, and to the nature and degree of *emotion* they excite in the person under inspection, is a key which opens

* Transactions of the Royal Society, Edinburgh. Vol. III.

a passage to the recesses of character. There is always a determinate relation between the disposition to be excited, and the actual stimulus of excitement. Excitability is a property of all the faculties; and these properties, however multifarious, are excited, each one, by an appropriate species of stimulus. In this appropriation, and in the emotion produced in the excitation, is discovered the governing principle of action, and the very spirit we are in search of.

The different dispositions and susceptibilities of our nature are adapted to receive different principles of thought and action. These dispositions are sometimes formed by original, personal, and mental organization; frequently produced by example and the imitative faculty; but generally effected, by a modified admixture of all these with education, and the influence of early surrounding circumstances. Dispositions, therefore, considered in their aptitude to be excited by certain impressions, and in the emotion produced by the re-action of their sensibility, will furnish important assistance, in developing the nature of the active principles, and the power of the energy by which they are accompanied.

It will readily appear, that the appreciation and enjoyment of this species of moral elevation,

as a matter of excellence and embellishment, is not, exactly, the aim of this disquisition. Most certainly, to be known, it must be investigated ; to be valued, it must be known. But in the investigation of the object, we meet with rudiments of power ; not mere perceptions of exquisite display, but indications of operative principle ; not only disclosing the energy of the sentiment, but regulating the direction, and efficacy of the action.

It is in this view of action and re-action, that we are so forcibly attracted to those scenes, where exquisite sensibility, and commensurate powers, have had to decide on, or encounter with extraordinary situations or events ; when it may be impressively pronounced of a personage so actuated, and so engaged, (as was observed on the character of Alexander,* and afterwards on that of Doctor John Brown,†) “ *by whatever object they were touched, the springs of his nature bent deeply inwards ; but they immediately rebounded with equal energy into action.*”

Considered in these important circumstances, the mind and character become as distinct and

* Preface to a poem on “ *Alexander's Expedition to the Indian Ocean,*” not generally circulated.

† Observations on the Character of J. Brown, M. D. by Doctor Beddoes ; who was also supposed to have written the former.

visible, as they are comprehensible and interesting ; and the writer, whose soul catches the ardour of their sensibility, transfuses, by the force and truth of his representation, a portion of that animation, which he is inspired with, into the breast of the sympathetic student. The pages of history, personal as well as general, are abundantly decorated with such illustrious exhibitions. The energetic workings of the mind, and the grandeur of the sentiments, fill the susceptible observer with no inconsiderable share of the emotion or magnanimity he is intent upon ; and the character is appreciated in proportion to the vividness of the sensation.

The great events and important transactions, which are recorded with such perspicuity and force, in the writings of Plutarch, furnish us with many splendid instances of this happy union of acute conception and fervid representation ; that *calling to*, (as the painters term it) of his animated pictures, which not only places before our eyes the very transaction in all its interest and bearings, but, absolutely, by a sensitive kind of violence, compels us into the actual situation of the scene, and fills us with every sentiment, purpose, and passion, which impel and agitate the bosom of the actor. Out of the many examples he af-

fords us, we shall, on the present occasion, take his description of the famous passage of the Rubicon, by Julius Cæsar, in his Life of that illustrious man, as, in a high degree, elucidating our remarks and principle.

The disadvantage, inseparable from his plan, meets him in this instance ; for he is under the necessity of delivering the same account and circumstances, more than once : first in his narration of the life of Pompey, and then in the course of the one before us. But, with his accustomed felicity, he apportions his materials and his skill with delicacy and discrimination ; reserving the luminous display of his imagination and spirit for his hero's purpose,—whose very genius he seems to have caught on the occasion. For, though the passage does not run into a lengthened detail, yet, within its compass, the great master most vividly conveys to us the momentous import of that awful period. Like Cæsar himself, he hesitates, reflects,—revolves upon the magnitude of the act ; communicates a few sentiments—ponders on the effects it will produce—anticipates that dreaded check upon the insatiable views of power, the condemnation of posterity ;—when, as if agitated by some supernatural impulse, and fired by the greatness of his object,

braving every consideration and consequence, he rushes headlong into the abyss of futurity :—— the die is cast !——*

There are many circumstances and scenes in the volumes of biography equally fraught with truth and spirit, and, often, more elaborate and diffuse than the instance we have adduced. The operation of our principle is, also, often observed in cases of less magnitude ; and, sometimes, in a single stroke of incident. Whatever elicits the fire of operative volition, of intention rising into act, should be received as a happy emanation of the biographic spirit, which is as evident in the sudden agency of detached circumstances, as when illustrated by the continued operation of a regular process.

Francis Drake on an eminence in the isthmus of Darien, and beholding, for the first time, the Pacific ocean, that object of his keen desire ;— Drake, in this high state of excitement, ejaculating, from his station, the fervent prayer, that he might, one day, navigate a British ship on those excluded seas !—gives us, at once, to enter into the ardour, the patriotism, and invincible perseverance which formed the enterprising character of our celebrated navigator.

* Aphorism 30. of the preceding Chapter.

The interesting scene of Washington's parting with his comrades in arms, after an entertainment, appointed in New York for that purpose, is, perhaps, one of the most affecting pictures ever produced by the biographic pencil ; and communicates, to our conception, in that one emphatic instance, the very heart and spirit of an hero,—as amiable as he was great ; as susceptible of the sympathies of affectionate fellowship, as endowed with the vigorous powers of an unshaken warrior, and a patriotic statesman.*

These observations are offered (and examples might be accumulated) to assist in establishing the existence of an active principle, founded on an acute sensibility to the workings of different passions, and the plastic power of transmitting the emotion effectually to the conception of a kindred observer. And it may be added, that this *moral agency* is not more perceptible in great transactions or extended process, than it is in those single strokes of depression or exaltation, which we feel, deciding, at once, the genuine nature of the governing passion. Amongst numberless instances of these sudden emanations, take the expressive triumph of Bruce on his supposed discovery of the source of the Nile ;†— and the

* Marshall's Life of General Washington, Vol. IV. page 677.

† Bruce's Travels, Vol. V.

happier exultation of Thomas Clarkson, on discovering, after long, arduous, and indefatigable search,—Isaac Parker, the most material evidence, as to the kidnapping part of the abominable Slave Trade.* Both excited by an enthusiastic apprehension of their object;—and each communicating his emotion in the full glow of biographic spirit.

Thus, “biography is studious of finding out the paths, which lead to our finest sensibilities; and by acquainting us with the domestic transactions, introducing us to the private hours, and disclosing to us the secret propensities, enjoyments, and weaknesses of celebrated persons, increases our sympathy in proportion to our intimacy with the object held up to us, and heightens our curiosity with the touches of affection and interest.”†

As the summary of our discussion, we may conclude, that it is in the elaborate and fervent study of character the biographic spirit displays its existence. In the enthusiasm of personation is caught that flame, which, whilst it enlightens, gives warmth, and likeness, and animation to the portrait; and carries with it this genuine effect, that we not only see with perspicuity the objects

* Clarkson's History of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade.

† Looker on, No. 11.

represented, but feel the impression on the very nerve of sensibility.

But, friendly reader, as the whole purpose of the present essay is to promote a scientific attachment towards this study, and may be considered as a projected instrument to excite, accumulate, and diffuse this spirit; under *its* influence, and in the hope of exploring, still farther, its nature, and its utility—let us proceed. “Quid censes, Cotta, nisi studium et ardorem quendam amoris? sine quo, cùm in vitâ nihil quicquam egregium, tum certé hoc, quod tu expetis, nemo unquam assequeretur.” *Cicero de Orat. Lib. I. C. 30.*

CHAP. III.

Impartiality and Moral Power.

Quis nescit primam esse historię legem, ne quid falsi dicere audeat, deinde ne quid veri non audeat?

Cicero de Oratore, Lib. II.

THE golden rule placed in the front of our chapter, though in frequent quotation, is offered, in the present division of the subject, as the clearest and most comprehensive summary of the sacred duties inseparable from the official station of the *biographer*, as well as the general historian. To have the independence of spirit, not only to abstain from direct falsehood, but to possess the noble confidence of declaring the *whole truth*, is the indispensable test required from the writer who engages in the composition of personal history. To be unprejudiced in the collection of materials, and impartial in their exhibition,—to unveil the features of guilt as well as virtue, and pronounce, with distributive equity, on their turpitude or merit,—are the binding ties of him who undertakes the administration of this important function.

The character of a biographer, being judicial as well as inquisitive, is invested no less with the privileges than the duties of an office, both deliberative and executive. His duties, which are substantiated with his privileges, regard,—first, his competency as to the requisite powers of a biographer ; next, the obligation, by which he is bound impartially to examine and decide on the character before him ; and lastly, the effective relation his work has to the public, and to posterity ; as a faithful transcript of genuine nature, as a study for the advancement of practical science, and as an exhibition to stimulate or dehort, according as the example warrants the claim of honour or the stigma of condemnation.

The form and the end of biography are founded on one principle, and that is utility : and utility can only proceed from faithfulness of representation. The requisites leading to fidelity are independence and industry ; the one giving a freedom of mind, fitted for the reception and promulgation of truth, and the other powers of attention for its investigation. Without a noble independence of mind, removed equally from sordid fear as from favourable expectation, the search, and even the knowledge, would be fruitless. The biographer should be under no control ; free in his researches, unrestrained in his function, sacred in his charac-

ter, exalted in his views, above the reach of power, and out of the prospects of favour.

An author, entering upon a work, when circumstances or times are likely to bear on him with control,* would do well to examine whether his mind be in such a state of freedom as to afford him the unbiassed operation of his powers, in his investigation and proposed disclosure of facts—whether a solicitude for the opinion of friends, a dread of the resentment of families, fear of the displeasure of patrons, or indignation of party, may not have the effect of deterring him even in the outset ; or whether hopes, the contrary of all these, may not warp his judgment in the very commencement of his studies. The influence of hopes and fears often works without being perceived, yet is powerful beyond notion or calculation. Steadiness is strengthened by preparatory disposition ; and resolution is often fortified by foreknowledge of the danger. To a mind prepared and cleared from extraneous circumstances, truth will seldom be disfigured by counterfeit appearances ; and industry alone will be necessary to remove the obstructions which may for a while conceal it.

* Suetonius, as Politian remarks, rather chose not to write the lives of Nerva, Trajan, and Adrian, the emperors of his time, than to run any risk, by speaking ill of persons then alive, or to seem less free and impartial, by extolling his superiors.

On the common incentives to industry and application, or their general powers, it would be foreign to the purpose to dwell much in this place : where they bear on the subject, as the occasion meets us, we may be more particular.—The tranquility, naturally arising from independence of mind and purity of intention, must spontaneously dispose the will to the necessary power of attention. To be attentive, we must resolve to be so : and nothing can strengthen resolution more than having a due sense of the importance of our object, and a proper knowledge and appreciation of its principles. Truth is the object ; and a “ sincere love of truth is the disposition most favourable for discovering her.”*

Bound in a peculiar mode of relation to his subject, the biographer, if he deal with legitimate justice, must divest himself of associations, which, in his individual character, identify him with his existing condition. The imperious claims, which hold him on other occasions, must here be resisted. In his great office, Truth is paramount ; and even the pleas of country, religion, or party, must, in this case, fail of their impression. The patriotic fire, that has impelled to the most heroic deeds, is a fit subject for the historian’s pen ; and to paint it with pre-

* Helvetius.

eision, it must be first felt with energy. But high as this principle ranks, and inseparable as it is from an exalted spirit, yet its influence must not warp or turn the devoted professor's mind from the sacred light of truth. How strong soever, on proper occasions, the passion may be felt and displayed—in the delineation of personal history, the writer must be of no country; he must, in that responsible juncture, consider himself as the minister of truth—one appointed by heaven, to search into and record the transactions of men, exactly as they are, without the consideration of country, quality, rank, or persuasion.

Bayle, who, from extended practice as well as accurate knowledge, was fully competent to pronounce upon the subject, expresses his sentiments in the following decisive manner. "All that are acquainted with the laws of history will agree, that every historian, who designs faithfully to discharge his function, ought entirely to dispossess himself of the spirit of flattery and calumny; and put on, as much as possible, such a Stoical temper, as is out of the reach of any disturbance from passion. Insensible to every thing else, he ought only to be concerned for the interest of truth, to which his duty obliges him to sacrifice the resentment of an injury, the

remembrance of a favour, and even the love of his country. He ought to forget that he was born in a certain territory, that he was bred up in the communion of a certain church, that he is indebted to the making of his fortune to such and such persons, and that such and such persons are his relations and friends. An historian, as such, like Melchisedec, is without father, without mother, and without pedigree.”*

Though, in the display of this impartial and independent spirit, we have many instances of failure, yet we are not without some illustrious examples of nobly sacrificing to justice the suggestions of every selfish consideration. Amongst those that might be produced on this occasion, no one seems to have preserved inviolable the character of historian with more magnanimity than Thucydides. He is a model, at once just, generous, and impartial. In his splendid and accurate pages, he, on all occasions, gives the proper tribute of applause to the Athenians, by whom he had been expatriated; and, without a vestige of resentment, pays all due regard to the merit of Cleon, who was the chief promoter of

* Bayle (*Hist. Dict. Art. Usson*) defending de Pleix's (*Hist. Hen. IV.*) account of the licentiousness of Margaret, queen of Navarre, his mistress and benefactress, against the abusive reflections of Bassompierre.—See also a note (D.) on Florimond de Remond: too long to be quoted, and too valuable to be curtailed

his banishment ;—thus nobly proving the excellence as well as verity of the maxim,—that the most eminent glory of an historian is, to do justice to his greatest enemies.

An historian (as is well expressed in a letter from Dr. Robertson to Mr Gibbon) *should feel himself a witness giving evidence upon oath.* The biographer is indispensably obligated by the same law. He is bound, fairly and firmly, to advance what he himself has gathered from actual observation, or what he has impartially collected from the unsuspected testimony and accounts of others. To the principles of impartial justice and innate love of truth, inseparable from his own character, he must join a penetrating and discriminative spirit of enquiry into the views and modes of thinking, which may influence the decisions and representations of those, whose authorities and opinions he has to work upon. He must not only correct the accounts, that are communicated or written in the spirit of evident partiality, but he must also be on his guard in considering and appreciating the narrations of those, who suppose themselves to be incapable of advancing any thing, but within the bounds of the strictest veracity. Though it may be mortifying to the pride of presumed accuracy, yet experience too frequently declares, that, even in circumstances

where they have been ear and eye-witnesses, and full of confidence in their fidelity and judgment, men will often furnish descriptions and accounts very wide of the real state of facts, when their minds are biassed by the imperceptible warpings of opinion and prejudice.*

There is nothing can impress conviction and interest upon the mind of the discerning reader with more forcible effect, than the evident manifestation of a spirit of impartiality pervading the whole matter and form of a composition. The fidelity which nobly animates, and the impartiality which justly exhibits transactions and views, not only lead the mind to confide in the general truth of the representations, but are moral evidences of the fairness of the author's positions and the justice of his conclusions. The impartiality so evidently displayed, throughout the whole course of scripture history, has, with critical propriety, been received as an unerring and invincible characteristic of the Truth of those sacred volumes. The examples and observations, which tend to this great view, suggest themselves so readily,

* Men represent and describe according as they conceive, and they conceive according to the frame of their imagination, and the turn of their opinions; so that among several persons, who have been spectators of the same thing, we seldom meet with any two that report it in the same manner; every one describing what he has seen according to the idea that he has formed of it, according to the model of his own notions, and the texture of his own intellect. *Rapin: Reflections on History.*

and seem so imperiously to demand our attentive regard, that we should respectfully and reverently avail ourselves of what is so obvious and important; but think, that to do justice to the occasion, we need not hesitate to take the aid of happier powers in the apt and impressive words of the learned and reverend Henry Kett;—words and sentiments which cannot be too highly valued, or too widely circulated.

“If we read the Lives of Plutarch, or the History of Livy, we soon discover that these writers composed their works under the influence of many prejudices in favour of their respective countries. A veil is thrown over the defects of their heroes, but their virtues are placed in a strong light, and painted in vivid colours. In the Scriptures, on the contrary, both of the Old and the New Testament, the strictest impartiality prevails. The vices of David, Solomon, and their successors, are neither concealed nor palliated.—There is no ostentation of vanity, no parade of panegyric; virtue charms with her native beauty, and vice acquires no disguise to conceal her deformity. The characters of persons are sketched, and the effects of the passions are represented without reserve or concealment; and the moral to be drawn from each description is so obvious, as to account for the frequent

omission of remarks and applications." And the same excellent author, in a preceding part of his work, beautifully and energetically remarks——
"Here presides the majesty of *pure and unsullied truth*; which shines in unadorned but awful state, and never turns aside to the blandishments of flattery, or listens to the insinuations of prejudice or calumny. Here alone she invariably supports the same dignified and uniform character; and points with equal impartiality to Peter now professing his unalterable fidelity, and now denying his Lord;—to the Apostles at one time deserting Christ, and, at another, hazarding their lives by the bold profession of his Gospel."*

So many principles are common to general history and individual biography, that, in a discussion and study like the present, it is necessary to point with accuracy at those cases where any material distinction in treating the subject seems to arise between them. In the present state of our observations, it will be useful to remark an essential difference which exists between these two species of historical composition, with regard to a failure in veracity, as separately affecting each. In historical narration, misrepresentations of facts and errors in judgment may possibly be

* Elements of General Knowledge, by Henry Kett, B. D.

qualified in their effects, by the character of the writer as it is received by the world, or as it may be gathered from the tenour of the work ; by the multiplicity of documents, and of other writers, who take different views of the question ; and by the experience of small errors not affecting the general spirit and representation. But in biography, an appearance of candour, or the unknown and therefore unsuspected character of the author, lays suspicion asleep ; two or more writers of the same life do not always appear, in which case the one might be found to correct the errors and partialities of the other ; and here the transgression is vital, as in delineating the features of individual life, every deviation from the truth will distort and misrepresent the very form and substance of the character.

It must be allowed that, very often, the operation of partiality or prejudice may be attributed to an author, when the charge has no foundation but in the reader's own opinions and principles. Readers have their prepossessions, as well as authors ; and if they find a biographer giving a favourable picture of one, whom they view through the refractive medium of national, religious, or party prejudice, it is pronounced by them an egregious exhibition of fulsome flattery ; never reflecting, from the want of impartial self-

examination, that the forms and colours they would impose are fabricated by their own ideas ; that it is the jaundice of their own eyes which would tinge with foulness—the distortions of their own fancies which would trace only deviation and deformity.

Reason and truth are the governing principles ; independence, integrity, and impartiality, the instruments of the execution :—independence of spirit, freely to apprehend and entertain the subject without hope, and without fear ; integrity of heart, always accompanied by a genuine love of truth, incapable of concealment or aggravation ; and impartiality that divests itself of every personal prejudice, in giving to the world an unbiassed, equitable representation of the subject in all its relations and bearings.* Guided by principles like these, we may safely leave the biographer in the prosecution of his task, and proceed to enquire into his higher powers of moral and censorial adjudication.

* Hanc in primis capere Historicus laudem debet, ut libertate usus maxima in scribendo, ut neque assentationi quasi obnoxius, neque obtreptioni quasi offensus, sed fidei servisse atque incorruptæ veritati existimetur, ne quid in eo servile, neve quid malignius deprehendatur, sic ut nec ullis conditionibus sollicitatus, neque mercedula cuiquam auctoratus, sed sui homo juris, rectus, atque intrepidus neutram in partem præponderet. *Póllitianus, Præfat. in Suetonium.*

It is the duty, as well as the prerogative of the biographer, to sit in judgment upon the motives and actions of men, whether springing from the incidents of contingency, or derived from the determinations of system. He is intrusted with the sword of justice, as well as with the pen of truth. What he describes as a faithful narrator, he may celebrate or stigmatize as an authorized moralist. Virtue will naturally claim its due praise; and vice should never pass before his tribunal, but with the full award of censure and condemnation.

The two great ends of biography are—to obtain a deeper insight into the principles of the human mind, and to offer examples to practical observation and improvement. For the one, accurate fidelity is necessary; and for the other, moral illustration. Were we a generation of philosophers or profound thinkers, perhaps the accuracy of minute narration would be only wanting; but when we consider, that as, from the entertaining and interesting nature of personal history, it finds its way to the closets and bosoms of the young and unthinking,—in such possible circumstances, to send vice abroad in the specious colours it so generally assumes, without exposing its deformity and loathsomeness, would be seduction and

not warning—would be to deteriorate and not to improve and instruct.

In this, as in most of the other high requisites of biography, Plutarch is pre-eminently excellent. He collects his premises with care, sums up with impartiality, and pronounces with decision. With what moral justice does he decide on the scandalous desertion of Agesilaus from Tachos to Nectanibis, his relation; pronouncing emphatically both on the private treachery of Agesilaus, and the pretended patriotism of Sparta, which indulged in such practices. His terms of reprehension are fitting and worthy of the moral historian. “When that slight veil is taken off, the right name of such proceeding is treachery and base desertion:—and the Lacedæmonians, by placing a regard to the advantage of their country in the first rank of honour and virtue, left themselves no criterion of justice but the aggrandizement of Sparta.”

The administration of the censorial power has been regarded as an indispensable duty by most of those great men, whom we look up to, as leaders in this important walk of literature. Nor can this moral dispensation be, in any instance, abandoned, if we would preserve to biography, that station it seems so well entitled to among the

nobler sciences ; not merely as a school of speculation and curiosity, but as an institute, deciding upon the nature of actions and their causes, pointing the influence of example to practical operation, and from a thorough knowledge of the whole case, in all its ethical relations, marking the issue with the eternal stamp of reprobation or renown. Johnson, however he may, sometimes, be warped in matters of opinion, does not often lose sight of the elevated character of a moral biographer. He pronounces with judicial firmness on the turpitude of vice, and the importance of virtue. In the elaborate life of the unfortunate Savage, he is eminently dignified ; he brings the wickedness of an unnatural mother—then alive—before the biographic tribunal ; traces the progression of her malice with an unsparing hand ; and, estimating the sacred duties of his office paramount to all considerations of rank or local eminence, has pronounced the sentence of condemnation, and sends down her monstrous character to the wonder and execration of posterity.

An uniform, settled character, whether of excellence or deformity, will not embarrass an author in his mode of proceeding. It is in those mixed dispositions, which it is our lot to feel as well as to observe, that delicacy no less than judgment is called upon to decide. Caligula or

Antoninus offer neither perplexity nor alternative to the historian ; but an Augustus and a Constantine demand minute investigation and discriminating justice. Where evil is predominant, the most scrupulous caution must be used, that the indignation of virtue* do not transport us into a disregard of any portion of moral rectitude that may be found ; nor must the brilliancy of either intellect, virtue, patriotism, or valour, induce us, with false tenderness, to conceal or palliate those errors, which might produce dangerous effects upon the observing, youthful mind, if softened, by a gentle management, into the general excellence of the character.

Bacon, the illustrious interpreter of nature, and founder of genuine philosophy,—he, whose all-comprehensive mind is the boast and glory of his country, and the concurrent admiration of the whole learned world—this leader in science, with almost perfection stamp'd upon his intellectual character, has stains indelible upon his moral one. Meanness of adulation, ingratitude, and even corruption, have been imputed to him ; and these, however painful the duty, and notwithstanding the mollifying extenuations of his easi-

* The indignation even of virtue may slide slowly and imperceptibly from justice to severity, from severity to rigour, and from rigour to cruelty. *Monthly Review of Burke's Letters on a Regicidal Peace, Vol. XXI. New Series, p. 322.*

ness of disposition, the innocence of his intentions, and the general servility of the times on which he was unfortunately thrown—these criminal deviations the biographer is compelled to register, and bound to condemn.

The courage, the perseverance, and nautical talents of our first English circumnavigator, have, in like manner, rendered his name dear to his own country, and illustrious in every other nation. Yet, with all his claims on our respect and admiration, what writer of the life of Francis Drake, would fail to expose the flagrancy of his guilt in the abominable transaction at Ternate—the abandonment of the poor, pregnant negro girl, with all its horrid circumstances? What moral biographer would dare to withhold from it his severest terms of censure and abhorrence? Doctor Mavor with becoming ethical dignity, expresses himself on the point before us—“We cannot mention an incident of this kind without reprobating such unfeeling conduct. It is our wish and our duty to mend, not to corrupt the heart; and while we record perfidy, it shall be our study to reprehend it.”

The biographer thus claims the right of free judgment on the motives, means, and actions of men. This judicial power is not exercised in solitary instances, but is directed to a whole series of

events and conduct ; not confined to certain inferior classes, but reaching to the great, the eminent, and the powerful ; pronouncing on the virtues and on the crimes of all, and fixing their moral character with posterity.

The office being of such importance, and the decisions involving such interesting consequences, the most patient attention and scrupulous impartiality must be exerted. The judgments are not to be delivered unqualified and dogmatic ; but should arise from a candid and temperate display of particular actions and circumstances, with their value balanced in the fair scale of ethical justice. In those instances, care must be taken that praise do not rise into panegyric, or reprehension degenerate into satire ;—and it must not be forgotten, that this practice of interposing the moral judgment should be used sparingly, and with discretion, and can be rarely admitted with safety, but when the magnitude of the case demands the tribute or decision of the biographer, or when the exposure throws more light on the prominent features and peculiar form of the character,

Many are apt to judge and decide on the actions and conduct of men by the prevailing regulations of their own times, by their own particular scale of right and wrong, or by the disproportionate test of local prejudice and arbi-

trary association. These partial decisions will, in many cases, be injurious, and in most cases inapplicable ; especially when the characters are removed by time, by country, or by degree of civilization, from the standard of our own practice and opinions. Giving appellations to the conduct and notions of men, according to our own estimation, or the opinions of the present day, is not the fair light in which to set a biographic picture. We often find that names and terms are adopted according to the feelings of party or variation of circumstances ; and the religious man, attached to his peculiar persuasion, is, by an adverse pen, branded with the appellation of bigot ; and what, in one case, is called rebellion, is, by a different class of writers, softened into the less-degrading term of revolution. In express political writings, or on the pages of controversy, such representations are admitted ; but are essentially foreign to the nature and purpose of biography, whose province it is to produce the likeness of man as he is, modified, certainly, by locality and circumstances, but drawn accurately with his own distinctive features, and according to the established rules of general nature—and not distorted by the notions and peculiar practice of the artist.

Dionysius Halicarnasseus ranks Decency as a primary virtue in an historian. This is the be-

coming principle that represents with clearness the characters of the personages exhibited, and preserves the dignity of the actions under consideration. Admitting the above, the question will arise—how far, consistent with a regard to the operation of this principle, in the course of his official duty, the biographer may proceed in his investigation and exposure of such vices as may come in review before him;—vices, deforming the possessors, and calling on him for just censure and marked abhorrence?

In one of the fifteen theorems, proposed by Paul Beni, in his work on the manner of writing history, the question is agitated—"whether the foul and gross particulars of transactions should be narrated?"—and the answer is in the affirmative; but with this essential qualification, that the accounts, so given, be cloathed in modest and general terms. With this decision every unpoluted mind must most sincerely accord. Vice, even in its ramifications and recesses, may, and ought to be exposed, in order to shew its hideousness, and secure its punishment in the detestation of posterity; but it is not to be grossly uncovered, or dwelt upon with meretricious implication and minuteness. On these accounts, and in this modest spirit, censure must unreservedly fall on the particular and disgusting views, given by

Suetonius, in his account of the abominable lives of some of the Roman emperors : nor will the qualifying antithesis, said to be St. Jerome's, that he had written the lives of those monsters with the same freedom with which they had led them, supply any vindication ; it can, at best, but place his descriptions on a level with *their* brutality.

There are others who have transgressed in this way, though, perhaps, not in so flagrant a manner as Suetonius ; yet they must all fall under appportionate degrees of the same reproach with the Roman biographer. Bayle, amidst other explanations in defence of his celebrated dictionary, has written an elaborate essay in vindication of this practice ; but though he has assembled, with great ingenuity, every argument that could be brought to bear upon the favourable side of his position,—from a dispassionate consideration of possible consequences, and a due appreciation of the sacred character of biographical composition, it may fairly be pronounced, that the balance decidedly inclines on the side of decency and moral estimation.

From the tenour of these remarks, it may be concluded, that in impartiality and modified censorial power are comprised the main duties and prerogatives of a biographer. And though it

may, in the imperfect condition of human nature, be considered almost hopeless to expect a mind so totally indifferent, or so divested of any kind of bias, as has been described and insisted on in these observations, yet, from the times of the critical writings of Cicero and Lucian down to those of Bodin and Paul Beni, and from the ratification of their laws by the more modern preceptors in literature, it is established, that nothing less than this equal state of disposition and purpose, can be accepted from the candidates of so important and responsible an office as the delineator and expounder of personal history. Should the historian perceive a seemingly-warranted degree of preference in his mind, and think himself allowed to play the advocate, the delicate task should be undertaken with discretion. Where doubts arise, he should, at least by some notes or reflections apart, candidly exhibit them, and advance, at the same time, every document illustrative of the subject; and, if the probability of the matter should strike him with any degree of preponderance, the grounds on which he forms his conviction should be adduced with the circumspect precision of moral evidence.—In short, he must be without prejudice, without policy, without passion; in his facts an impartial witness, in his animadversions an accurate, an upright judge.

CHAP. IV.

Matter and Auxiliary Objects.

BIOGRAPHY may now be considered with regard to the materials of which it is composed ;—their relation, connection, and arrangement ; the principles which animate, the laws by which they are governed, and the general characteristics resulting from such a combination. The simple elements will be perceptions, appetites, habits, manners, passions, incidents, pursuits, avoidances,—and the acts and opinions arising from their association and progression ; the whole knowledge of which can only be attained by personal observation, or probable authority.

It has been already remarked, that there can be no complete account of the actions and opinions of any individual, but that which is written by a man's self in the pure spirit of truth and self-disclosure. Second only to this pre-eminent advantage is, the favourable circumstance of the writer being in so intimate a relation with the character to be delineated, that he may have an ample opportunity of observing the series and connection of purposes and events, of sentiment

and action. If, thus happily situated, the discerning friend has conceived the design of recording the transactions and opinions which appear before him, materials, in their accumulation, will assume a degree of definable clearness and coherence, proportionate to the attention and skill of the observer : and it is this attention and this skill which give value, and proportion, and appropriate station, to the various appearances continually presented to his examination. Doctor Johnson remarks, that biography is rarely well executed. They only, he adds, who live with a man, can write his life with any genuine exactness and discrimination ; and few people who live with a man *know what to remark about him*. The chaplain of a deceased bishop, whom he was to assist in writing some memoirs of the good prelate, when the doctor came to examine him as to the prominent features and particulars, found—" he could tell him almost nothing."

If such delicacy of discernment be necessary to those who possess the advantages of personal knowledge and observation, certainly a more difficult task falls to the share of the biographer, who has to collect his materials from the suspicious testimony and vague remembrance of others ; from scattered documents, from ill-applying letters, from reports, from dubious

circumstances ; from probability, from analogy, and even from conjecture.

But, whether we draw the biographic matter from the conscious process of our own transactions, from a close inspection of the lives of others, or from the less-attainable sources of document and authority, still its distinctness and arrangement form an indispensable object of consideration. This matter, which is to be molded into form and likeness, has its rise and substance from our natural and acquired dispositions ; from the circumstances by which we are surrounded ; and from the sentiments and actions resulting from the combination. The disposition, as tinging the whole mass, must be regarded in its original constitution, as well as in the factitious changes it receives from imitation, habit, and culture ; circumstances must be attended to, as they are presented by rank, connexion, profession, age, sex, and other assignable positions, together with those fortuitous incidents which occur without relation to condition or locality ; and from principles and conduct, from opinions and acts, are formed the prominent members of the composition :—these are the phenomena which influence and designate the motives and pursuits of life, as they are impelled by the two great springs of human action—opportunity and necessity.

These general heads may be kept in view, even when we consider their component parts more in detail. For though the materials be copious, and the access to information unrestrained, without a penetration to examine, judgment to select, and skill to dispose, the more abundant the matter, the more confused will be the account.

In order to direct their attention to those instances which seemed biographically essential, the conductors of the Annual Necrology formed a string of Queries, to be circulated among the relatives of eminent persons recently deceased. They seemed well calculated for the purpose of gaining a fair complement of summary information, suitable to the nature of their design. But as our purpose, in this attempt, is to go nearer to the instances in disquisition, it will not be out of order, in this place, to lay down a table of the principal points that claim biographical notice, and exclusively form the ground-work of the representation : and however imperfect the collection and arrangement may seem as to general use, it may serve as a specimen, and suggest a notion how minute the attention should be, and how comprehensive the researches, that have to insure success in this delicate and arduous species of writing.

As the periods of the following synopsis will be treated more at large in the third part of this Essay, it appears sufficient, for the present purpose, only to give the heads or titles of those states and periods ; the example offering merely the appearance of a table or index. It must likewise be kept in view, that the local conditions, here summed up, are to be considered on a general scale—are to be regarded as the great continuous chain on which events are linked, as the ground in which are set all those various acts and pursuits, which form the true and practicable materials of biography.

TABLE.

As every circumstance, which might influence the disposition, character, and conduct, comes within the scope of our consideration—our studies commence with a survey of the manners and state of the country (where our hero is born) as far as they regard the condition of our subject. His parents, their rank in life and character. Circumstances, before or at his birth, by which he was liable to be permanently affected. Time of birth.

Infancy.—Bodily constitution and form. Manner of receiving nutriment : whether from the

breasts of the mother, a hireling nurse, or without that mode of nutrition at all. Sickness and health. Early natural disposition.

Childhood.—Brothers, sisters, or other domestic relatives. Companions. Sports. City or country. Early tales and songs. Temperaments. Courage or timidity. Susceptibility or dulness. Severity, or laxity, or total want of parental or other authority. Leisure for the mind to exercise its powers ; from situation, ill health, or other circumstances.

Adolescence.—Schools. Tutors. Condisciples. Self-comparison, of condition, of person, of mind, with the immediate surrounding society. Books independent of those peculiar to education. Religion. Freedom or strictness of manners. Appetites. Amusements. Casual circumstances.

Youth.—Personal qualities. Education, public or private. Studies. Attention or indolence. Local situation and scenery. Companions. Visits. Conversation. Convivial habits or temperance. Dress. Habits. Manners. Friends. Competitors. Adversaries. Correspondence. Commerce with the fair sex. Pursuits. Obstructions. Helps. Patronage. Attainments. Miscarriages.

Manhood.—Connections. Travels. Political principles. Changes of sentiment, or maturity of and steadiness in former opinions and practices. Profession. Public distinction. Office. Habitual employment. Works of literature or science. Passions. Society. Settlement. Marriage. Domestic habits. Children. Condition in life. Affluence, or adversity. Exploits or general transactions, if any, to be considered in that portion of the progress where they occurred. Incidental circumstances.

Age.—Respect or neglect. Liberality or avarice. Comforts. Family. Friends. Correspondence. Declension. Sickness; and lastly—Death: with all the circumstances attending and following the awful catastrophe. Funeral. Last will. Funeral oration and epitaph.

The life of man should be considered as a comprehensive whole, composed of certain grand portions; these are subdivided into many other parts, which, though essential, are less obvious. In the latter are found those distinctive features, which form the resemblance or point out the dissimilarity of character. These minute particulars, which are in continual flow, make up the substance and current of human existence. The great actions of eminent characters are sufficiently con-

spicuous, and generally constitute the whole of common biography. But the familiar scenes of life are what shew the individual in his true colours ; and such, from affected refinement, are almost entirely banished from modern narrative. Plutarch abounds in these particular characteristic passages, in the delineation of which he is peculiarly happy. He possesses, as Rousseau remarks, an inimitable grace in drawing great men in little things. The same susceptible observer, in some other place, also says—" Behold the true art of drawing characters ; the physiognomy does not shew itself in great features, nor the character in great actions ; it is in trifles that the natural disposition discovers itself. Public things are too common or too borrowed ; and it is almost on these only that modern dignity permits authors to dwell."

In some instances, a minuteness of representation has been condemned : the selection therefore requires both penetration and discretion. The practice should be judiciously limited, by not admitting every irrelative, idle story, that can be gleaned, nor rejecting any passage, however minute, which may serve to throw a ray of light on individual peculiarity, or can direct to any distinct aspect of the general human character.

The mere transactions in a narrative will many times appear unaccountable and even monstrous, unless they are accompanied by their modifying circumstances ; or that the author has depicted the peculiar manners of his subject with such precision and clearness, that we may pronounce on the characteristic consistency of the action, from our knowledge of the appropriate disposition of the agent. So that it may be allowed, that transactions which seem obscure or unaccountable should not be left isolated, or merely as they start up apparently detached—*Non bene junctarum discordia semina rerum*—they should not only be connected, as much as is in the power of the artist, with what went before and what succeeded, but they should also be compared with other more obvious and connected circumstances of his life, which seem to bear analogy and application to the points in question. In considering the progression of man's life, many points will appear doubtful, and many things obscure. Now these uncertainties, having peculiar relation and locality, may sometimes be cleared up by the analogy of another biographical case, where circumstances of a similar relation and locality are more evident and attainable ; * as in the economy of the lower

† Another thing to be considered with regard to Facts is, whether they are probable : and here experience, or the observation of similar events, made by ourselves or others, may be of great use to assist us in forming a judgment concerning the probability of past facts, or in forming conjectures concerning future ones. *Island's View of Deistical Writers.*

animals, naturalists do not hesitate to illustrate what they find obscure in one tribe, by what appears conspicuous in another of the same species.

Why so many concurring and analogous studies, particularly those of various biography, are thus sedulously recommended, is, that they may afford some assistance in bringing probable consistency out of doubtful cases. The aim is, that we be so well acquainted with the rise, progress, connection, and termination, of known circumstances, and with the associated sentiments and facts that may influence and modify such cases, as to acquire a practical aptitude to apply these established instances to the development of similar transactions, where the latent process is not so obvious. For though a biographer is not called upon to lay open a doubtful or a disputed case with the minute detail and argument of a law-question, yet, from an habitual study of the various motives and modes of action, from an acquired faculty of estimating testimony and appearance, and from a long practice of impartially weighing both sides of a subject, he will come better qualified to supply whatever may be deficient, and illustrate whatever may be doubtful.

Detached, insulated facts offer no matter for delineation or development. Every prominent

incident in life follows and is dependent on those which have preceded. The business of the biographer is, to trace the links by which they were united : and by every such process of investigation we advance one step further in a distinctive appreciation of general character—one degree more in the important science of cause and consequence.

What are those links ? They must be acts or thoughts. If acts, they must be certain minor incidents interposed and connected with those that are more conspicuous ; and, as such, should be examined, as well according to their own particular nature, as in their conjunctive relation to the events immediately preceding and following. If thoughts, they must consist of certain peculiar views taken of occurring circumstances, estimation of their relative interest and importance, and the resulting volition which determines to action.

But in this investigation, both skill and close attention are necessary, lest juxta-position be taken for association, and exception adopted instead of principle. Facts which do not accord with the general congruity of succession, as guided by the known principles of the character and conduct in question, must be looked on with suspicion, and minutely scanned by the laws of connective probability.

Where it is difficult to reconcile appearances to the circumstances of the situation presented, not only the peculiar condition of the principal personage is to be studied with deep attention, but also the views, power, and relation of those characters, which possess, by their agency or connection, an influence in the general effect.

The Duchess of Marlborough, in her Memoirs, mentions the unfeeling gaiety which appeared in Mary, the consort of the Prince of Orange, on her taking possession of the royal apartments, from which her unfortunate father had been so lately driven. This, from the affecting circumstances of the situation, and from the contradiction it bore to the general tenour of that amiable princess's character, would induce the examiner to pause—and take a wider and deeper view of the preceding circumstances, as well as of the peculiar designs and influence of those who might induce such an unsuitable appearance. The moment the reality is doubted, the inquirer will be led to conclude that the influence must be of the highest kind, which could compel such unnatural affectation;—and all this will readily resolve into the views, ambition, and critical situation of her husband, with his known power over the ostensible demeanour of the princess's conduct. Without pursuing farther the train of investigation that

might connect the links between conjecture and certainty, we have the problem solved by Bishop Burnet ; who, doubting the reality of the appearance, inquired of the princess herself, and had the circumstance explained. During the first stage of the revolution, exaggerated rumours, as usual, were in continual circulation. Amongst these, the imminent danger of king James's life was in frequent report. This affected the natural filial affection of the princess, then in Holland, with becoming melancholy ; and was reported to the friends of the revolution in England, as proceeding from her dissatisfaction at their measures. The prince of Orange being informed of this matter, and the way in which it had been represented, enjoined her by letter, that on her first coming over, she should put on such a cheerful aspect and demeanour, as might give sanction and encouragement to the cause and high objects he had in view ; so that, as she replied to the bishop, in her cheerfulness, she might perhaps go too far, as she was obeying directions, and acting a part which was not very natural to her.

In the case above cited, the seeming incongruity is amply accounted for. Yet, even without the helps of these fortunate solutions, it has been the practice of the most eminent biographers to make use of this auxiliary application of the known

parts of a man's disposition and character, in order to explain other appearances, which, without these elucidations, would seem dubious or inexplicable. But though we admit the discreet use of this practice among the Helps of biography, it must be allowed to be no more than a species of conjecture, and should be resorted to under all the restrictions of close attention and accurate comparison.

A few instances may illustrate the meaning as well as the value attached to this class of auxiliaries.—A charge against Pompey is very ingeniously parried by Plutarch, from this mode of considering the more known and general attributes of his character. "Timagines pretends that Ptolemy left Egypt, without any necessity, at the persuasion of Theophanes, who was desirous to give Pompey new occasions to enrich himself, and the honour of new commands. But the baseness of Theophanes does not so much support this story, as the disposition of Pompey discredits it; for there was nothing so mean and illiberal in his ambition."—Another we will add from a consummate master in this kind of comparative inference. On Prior's publishing the "City Mouse" and "Country Mouse," to ridicule Dryden's "Hind and Panther," Dryden was said to have been so much hurt as even to shed tears. Johnson,

in the true biographic spirit, confutes this, as well from the characteristic experience of the man, as from the general principles and usages of external conduct. "Dryden had been more accustomed to hostilities, than that such enemies should break his quiet. And if we can suppose him vexed, it would be hard to deny him sense enough to conceal his uneasiness."

There is another good example of this practice in the *Essays on Shaftesbury's Characteristics*; where the author, differing from the general notion of historians, offers rather a plausible opinion, with regard to Julius Cæsar's being apparently so much moved by Cicero's oration in behalf of Ligarius. The ingenious commentator considers it as a master-stroke of deep simulation in the Dictator. He, in that species of elocution, was too good a judge himself, not to know all the artifices of oratorical ingenuity and persuasion, or to be surprised into any violent emotions, from the composition or delivery of any declaimer. But he wished for the countenance of Cicero to his usurped administration; and appreciating well the vanity of the speaker, knew that nothing could buy his friendship so effectually as the credit of having moved to his purpose, by the powers of his oratory, no less a personage than the master of the world.

One more instance of the auxiliary nature of probability and analogy, and of their use in the advancement of biographic investigation, may be offered; not as vouching for the truth of the surmise, but as submitting an example of the practice. The shameless avowal of guilt, and the unnatural cruelty of Anne, countess of Macclesfield, to her own son, the celebrated and wretched Savage, are as generally known, as her character is unreservedly execrated. But the motives, which could reverse the operation of the laws of nature in the breast of this abandoned woman, have still been undetected; and have left the philosopher as well as the moralist without a clew to the cause of so monstrous a perversion.

Now, taking a minute and comprehensive review of all the possible motives which could influence her case, and comparing the protracted persecution of her miserable victim with the early period of her rancorous determination, we must perceive that the hatred, malice, and future abandonment, had passed into a resolution before the audacious avowal of her infamous circumstances, and that the cause of this unnatural abhorrence had a deeper source. Might she not be conscious that the child was the son of Macclesfield, and not of Rivers? If so, in such an abandoned character, her hatred of the father would

be transferred to his offspring; and the bastardising of his child, and vindictively pursuing it with cruelty to the last, has a consistent process; which, though it cannot lessen her infamy, will furnish a motive, however base, for her detested conduct.

Probable inferences often assume the validity of facts, when the general tenure and consistency of character seems to warrant the conclusion; and of this ingenious mode of forming supposed conclusions from established antecedents, without further observations, a few instances may be adduced. Johnson has many examples. In his *Life of Savage*, he acutely remarks—"As he always spoke with respect of his master, it is probable that the mean rank in which he then appeared did not hinder his genius from being distinguished, or his industry from being rewarded: and if in so low a state he obtained distinctions and rewards, it is not likely they were gained but by genius and industry."

From "Observations on the Character of John Brown, M. D." the following deduction is an exemplification of the practice on which we are remarking. "From expressions that he sometimes dropped in his lectures, I conclude that he was endowed with that quickness of sympathy,

Letters are to biography what state-papers are to history ; and what Ralph, the historian, ascribes to the latter, may be fairly applied to the utility of the former—that they are the very chart and compass of biography. And, though familiar letters, like those on state affairs, “ may and must partake of the private views, passions, prejudices, and interests of the writers,” yet, in the delineation of individual history, all this is of advantage, and the very personalities that may be discovered will assist in throwing distinct lights upon the character.

Letters, then, though sometimes derided by some able judges of these matters,* are too valuable a depository of biographic matter to be given up on slight objections. When the instances and postulates of these documents are set in comparison with the known general tenure of a man's disposition and conduct, the truth of their colouring will be estimated with probable accuracy. If even a person should design to conceal his actual sentiments and purposes, or should self-delusion lead him unconsciously to the gloss of palliation or disguise,—still the facts,

* Doctor Johnson, animadverting on the letters of Mr. Pope, says—
“ But it must be remembered, that he had the power of favouring himself ; he might originally have had publication in his mind, and have written with care, or have afterwards selected those which he had most happily conceived, or most diligently laboured.”

the circumstances of which the letters treat, appear in the very nature of the subjects which are handled, or may, sometimes, be discovered within the circles of the respective correspondents ; so that the matter of incident and condition can be obtained, though we may not be absolutely certain of the motives or opinions which prompted and accompanied the occasion.

Letters, written in the genuine confidence of self-disclosure, offer, certainly, the most important materials to biographical composition. They are even beyond what could be supplied by the opportunity of a constant observation of the whole series of designs, pursuits, and attainments : for observation can only furnish us with the view and tenure of a man's ostensible actions ; but letters lay open the communication of his very thoughts and purposes.

It must be obvious to every one engaged in this kind of study, that in examining facts and opinions in epistolary compositions, much cool discretion will be necessary. The mind must be guarded against an indiscriminate respect or partiality towards the endowments of the author, or too implicit an admiration of the merit of his writings. The character, foibles, and general designs of the man, should be taken into account. The relation

subsisting between him and his correspondent—whether any particular purpose or any certain opinion is to be accomplished or enhanced by the expression and purport of his letters—and whether they are designed to meet other eyes than those of the correspondent, or laboured and finished with a view to future publication ;—all these circumstances should be carefully weighed, and accurately appreciated. Under the correction of such considerations, epistolary writings may be consulted with safety and advantage. For, notwithstanding his acute and extensive knowledge of the human character, we do not altogether agree with Doctor Johnson, in his sweeping remark—that “ true characters of men are not to be found in their letters. Few can boast of hearts which they dare shew to themselves ; and what we hide from ourselves we do not shew to our friends.”*

That there have been some instances of this concealment and duplicity—and found too among characters of as unlimited celebrity as deservedly falls to the share of our suspicious remarker—must inevitably be conceded. Yet we will hum-

* And yet, that the Doctor could take the other side of the question, will appear from the following passage, in a letter to Mrs. Thrale.—“ In a man's letters his soul lies naked ; his letters are only the mirror of his breast ; whatever passes within him is shewn undisguised in its natural process ; nothing is inverted, nothing distorted ; you see systems in their elements ; you discover actions in their motives.”

bly hope—nay, contend—that the fact is far from being general; and even under the disadvantage of these perversions and restraints, there will be always left a portion of unavoidable reality, sufficient to produce some eviction of truth, some insight into the internal operation of sentiments and disposition. For we are induced to believe with a worthy prelate, that—“letters, written *ere nata*, and bearing a synchronism or equality of time *cum rebus gestis*, have no other fault but that of speaking the truth too plainly.”*

In this place, the subject of letters has been considered as furnishing materials or auxiliary studies to the biographer; in a former division of the Essay, they have been treated, as, in themselves, forming distinct, constituent portions of the integral composition.

Though much might be added on the topic of this interesting kind of characteristic communication, it may, perhaps, be as well—on the score of conciseness—to leave the more extensive consideration of the subject to the inclination and opportunity of the student.

There are, however, other classes of familiar letters, which, whether regarded as supplying

* Bishop of Lincoln to Lord Bacon,

matter principal or auxiliary, or, as they form precise component parts of the whole, are of too important a nature to be entirely omitted.

These are the letters written by others, which may be made use of to our purpose ; and which are totally directed, or, incidentally, but forcibly, applied to the subject of the biography. In this range of moral evidence, at the least, the same precautions must be taken as were suggested in the former case. For though a man may be induced, from self-delusion, shame, vanity, interest, or design, to disguise his sentiments and purposes, these motives are, in a compound ratio, multiplied, when the subject comes to be treated by various hands and different dispositions. Eulogists and detractors, adherents, competitors, adversaries, and every other relation in which man stands to man, will, each and all, have their influence in the observations given, and the judgments pronounced on such occasions.

Notwithstanding these apparent discouragements, there can be no doubt, but that, after making due allowances for the character of the person writing, and the circumstances and views by which he may be actuated, much valuable matter is frequently gained from these epistolary

vehicles. The various lights which are thrown upon a person's manners and conduct, from the several points of view in which they are considered by different observers, must, as a result of the whole, have considerable effect in exhibiting the characteristic portraiture, as well in the likeness of the particular features, as in the adaptation and symmetry of the general combination.

Letters, also, thus written by a third person, may be admitted, as component parts of the work, either at full length, or in applicable detached parts, according to the discretion of the biographer. They operate by a reflective light, and shew a man, not according to the shape of his own self-estimation, or the form in which he would represent himself to others, but as he is actually regarded and distinguished by his contemporaries. The advantages attending this mode of narrating and describing, from the observations and in the very language of others, must appear too evident to be neglected; therefore it will be found that most of our eminent composers of lives have availed themselves of these incidental documents, whenever they were fortunate enough to gain access to such valuable memorials. Melchior Adam is peculiarly happy in these introductions. Excellent examples of the

utility of the practice will be found in his Lives : especially in that of Rodolphus Agricola (among the physicians) where he brings forward some excellently-drawn characters and testimonies of his hero by Erasmus and others.

The testimonials arising from Elogies, or from Funeral Orations, must be received with caution ; as the very nature of the medium, by which they are conveyed, renders it liable to be tinged with too high a proportion of indiscriminate praise.* They are not, however, to be entirely overlooked, as many facts and observations of character are frequently to be gleaned only from such sources.

Testamentary reflections and bequests form valuable stores for the enrichment of biographical composition. They take place at a time when, unless in some extraordinary instances, the mind discloses the result of long-cherished opinions, and the heart gives up the train of its sensibilities without reserve. In those sentiments expressed by the last Will and Testament of a man possessing superior powers of intellect, or of one, who, by his condition in life, has been connected with important situations and events, we naturally expect that clear decision of opinion

* On sait que la plupart des Oraisons funebres, ou brille la plus haute eloquence, sont plus l'affaire du Predicateur que du defunt.

Perrault pref. a " *Les hommes illustres.* "

and purpose, which affixes the closing seal to an undisguised expression of the genuine character. At the time of making this last solemn declaration of the thoughts and purposes, "the real wishes of the heart are suffered to appear, because we shall be indifferent to the consequences of them before they can be divulged." "Freed from all the false and foreign motives which prompt him when on the stage, in his retirement man is seen as he is ; actuated by, and therefore expressing, his natural emotions only."* That much genuine knowledge, fitted to assist in clearing up obscure and doubtful points of the previous character, may be gained from these testamentary disposals, will be readily granted by those who may be inclined to contemplate the nature of the subject ; and as a corroborating instance, let it be borne in mind, that the famous Will of Julius Cæsar, beside the important effects it produced upon the history of the time, served more than any other circumstance, to elucidate some equivocal appearances in the life of that extraordinary man—and to prove, beyond all feasible doubt, that the popular bent of his manners and disposition was not assumed, but real—was not affected, merely to serve a purpose, but formed a positive essential portion of his character.

* On the Will of Henry VII, Monthly Review, March, 1775.

Anecdote has been called a biographical incident, a minute passage of private life ; and of course, some notice on the subject is demanded from us in this place.

Anecdotes are favourite components of the biographical mass : and, while they reflect any distinguishing light upon the character, or assist in uniting the direction and consistence of progression, are valuable as well as pleasing. But, when collected indiscriminately, and inserted without connection, they have the effect of distracting instead of gratifying curiosity,—of confounding inquiry in the place of furnishing information.

As well as numerous collections of anecdotes there have been also treatises on the subject, which it might appear neglectful to pass over, in such an attempt as this, without some notice.—Mr. D'Israeli has given us an ingenious Dissertation on Anecdotes, and has supplied an ample collection. Those of Seward are arranged chronologically from the time of Edward I. The anecdote writers of antiquity are Athenæus, Ælian, Valerius Maximus, and Aulus Gellius ; the *Noctes Atticæ*, of the latter, are, like most collections, without arrangement, and oftener critical than biographical. But the mention of

these, and other similar works which might be added, is meant to take an opportunity of remarking, that, however favourable to biographic study and composition such productions may appear to be, at first sight, we will find, on after consideration, they are, in general, compiled in such a way as to be of little, if of any use in supplying materials for personal delineation, or in offering examples for general study.

Anecdotes of the person, who is the immediate subject of representation, will, most naturally, be sought for from any source, however irregular or imperfect. But, in the eagerness of collecting information, accumulation may be too minute and indiscriminate. What is conceived as important in the view of the writer, may appear insignificant even to the curiosity of the reader ; and, where attention is excited without being gratified, the effect is weariness and not enjoyment. In this, as well as in other points of biographical composition, all will depend on the judgment and taste that are brought to the selection. Irrelative or unworthy matter, however precisely ascertained, may fairly be passed by ; and what carries a semblance of elucidating or connecting the subject, though in appearance diminutive, may be admitted with advantage.

For general study, these compilations offer little opportunity of improvement. The suddenness of the transitions, and the difference, and even opposition of the subjects, can afford no incitement to attention—no clue to direction or design.

The speeches or sayings of great men have always been considered of high importance in this species of writing. The most attractive pieces of biography are those which are most plentifully enriched with apophthegms and colloquial passages. They are not only delightful from their peculiar excellence, but are of advantage as designations of intellect and intention; the character often displaying itself more fully in discourse than even in the display of action.

In Xenophon's *Memorabilia* of Socrates we have a noble monument of ancient wisdom, preserved to us in the sayings and conversation of that first of philosophers. The scrupulous delicacy of modern criticism does not admit the introduction of Dialogue into regular biography. Yet where it has been ventured upon, the advantages and beauties, gained by such a mode of exhibition, have almost outweighed the questionable right of their admission. Could conversation be retained with such a degree of accuracy, as to give a *presumptive* confidence in the fidelity of

the reporter's statement, the information, as well as the spirit, imparted by this valuable addition, would appear to advance the composition of biography almost to a state of perfection. When it is recollected that many, if not most, of the essential scenes of life have been transacted in this form, their representation, if warranted by sufficient authority, would not only exhibit the external form, but would also lay open the internal springs and genuine operations, which disclose and generally determine the character : and it was on this account, and under this point of view, that attention to the best scenes of our higher dramatic writers was recommended, as a useful auxiliary among the preparatory studies.

However desirable these lively additions might be in biographical writing, and however near to accuracy they may sometimes be in the verisimilitude of their representation—such as we frequently find in the quaint and honest delineations of Isaac Walton—we cannot venture to admit the practise with such extension of plausible semblance, as that, which seemed to demand from the ingenious and amiable writer the palliation of an apology. In the preface to his *Life of Bishop Sanderson*, he thus deprecates the animadversion of his perusers. “I desire to tell the reader, that in this relation I have been so bold, as to para-

phrase and say, what I think he (whom I had the happiness to know well) would have said upon the same occasions ; and if I have been too bold in doing so, and cannot now beg pardon of him that loved me, yet I do of my reader, from whom I desire the same favour."

There cannot, perhaps, be found a more lively example of this practice, than what is to be met with in Whitlock's Journal of his Embassy to Sweden. There are three dialogues introduced with Cromwell, with his wife, and with W. Cooke, his tenant. There is also an interesting conference with a Dutch Skipper, which extends to the length of forty questions and answers on each side. The information presented in this manner, though not greatly important, is so genuine in its simplicity, and so minute in its connection—has so much integrity on the face of it, and is given in a way so nearly approaching to actual appearance, that it may be fairly rated as a subject for moral study, and an example for colloquial representation.

Plutarch, skilled and excellent in the various requisites of biography, has not failed, on suitable occasions, to introduce the speeches and pointed replies of his several heroes. The vast and interesting collection of apophthegms, accumulated

by the industry of Diogenes Laertius, and originally uttered by the celebrated wise men and philosophers of antiquity, contains a noble stock of wisdom, both for admiration and study. Without his care and diligence, little, relative to the lives, doctrines, or maxims of these illustrious sages, would have been preserved to posterity: and in so precise and animated a way has he recorded the spirit, substance, and manner of their sayings and their aphorisms, that his work has been denominated a repository of all the serious wit of learned Greece.

Richard Milward, amanuensis to the great Selden, affirms, that for twenty years he had the opportunity of hearing the discourses of that famous scholar and antiquary; and that he faithfully preserved in writing the excellent things that usually fell from him. These this patient observer has collected and recorded in a publication entitled "Table Talk;" a work which contains an assemblage of unrestricted sentiments and opinions entertained and pronounced by Selden; such as could not have been procured or preserved but by similar opportunity and perseverance.

Books in ANA, as far as they illustrate the character of the personage by whose name they

are distinguished, claim a respectful degree of notice. Appropriate regard was paid to the elaborate biographical work of Mr. Boswell, in a former division of our subject. In this place, we may just be suffered to add, that for auxiliary materials as well as essential facts, towards defining and elucidating an individual character, a more ample and discriminate treasure cannot be found in the whole range of biographical compilation.

Having considered the previous necessary qualifications, having drawn out the whole apparatus of biographical representation ;—having attempted to display the materials of its construction, the spirit by which the various parts are united and actuated, the moral laws by which all is governed, together with the auxiliary matter contributing essential or adventitious aid towards perfecting the design ;—we now close this part of the subject, and proceed to consider the objects which have been hitherto examined, as adjusted and rectified into order—as modified and formed into combination and structure.

ESSAY
ON
BIOGRAPHY.

PART THIRD.

COMPOSITION.

CHAP. I.

Order and Process of the Work.

SECT. I. EXORDIUM.

WE may now assume the hope that we bring to the execution of the work, a mind possessing all the requisites of a true biographer : prepared by applicable studies, inspired with the biographic spirit, having independence of mind to receive, and industry to investigate the truth ; with impartiality and moral sense to see and appreciate actions as they are, and with courage to

promulgate and pronounce upon them when detected ; supplying ourselves with materials from the stores of observation, testimony, and warranted documents, aided by the helps of well-founded conjecture and rational analogy ; exact and acute in the application of principles ; with penetration to discover motives and discern counsels ; to follow pursuits, estimate attainments, and trace consequences ; in fine, with a practical knowledge of the essential qualities, the prevailing habits, the common pursuits, and the general spirit of the human character. With a disposition and powers thus prepared, it may be permitted that we enter, without hesitation, on the immediate province of personal history.

Writers of lives, in general, commence their narrative precisely at the birth of their hero. Without a glance at surrounding objects or circumstances, the student is abruptly introduced to the natal chamber, and presented with a cold enumeration of names and dates. In an abridged collection of memoirs, or where the subject is unimportant, the privilege of brevity may be claimed. But, in a piece of genuine biography, it is desirable that the reader should be gained by such an easy introduction as will conciliate his good opinion, and lead him pleasantly to the entrance of the narration ; such as may prepare

him with relative information, and attract his attention at the very commencement.

The first care should be, that the proem be proportionate to the dignity and probable length of the subject. In the introduction, general, but applicable observations may be used ; especially if a particular end be in view, as elucidating some pursuit, passion, or profession. But care must be taken, that the observations immediately refer to the subject in hand, and be so connected with the subsequent relation as not to appear, like the flourish of a musician,* a thing detached ; but, like a proportionable member, connected with the whole body : thereby avoiding the errors of Sallust and Thucydides, whose introductions, as Bolingbroke aptly remarks, might serve almost for any other piece of the Roman or Grecian story, as well as for those particular portions which these two great writers had chosen.

The first part of the introduction should relate to the intent of the author, in writing a particular life, with a transient view of the subject, considered in that light, if it will bear such an application. Examples of this practice are so frequent, both in ancient and modern biography,

* Cicero de Orat. Lib. II. c. 60.

that an enumeration may be deemed unnecessary; we may point, however, among the ancients, to Plutarch's Paulus Æmilius and Pelopidas--and to Lucian's introduction to his Life, or eulogy of Demonax; and amongst some of the most celebrated of our modern biographers the advantage has not been overlooked.

Our next care should be, to take a review of the times and general circumstances; so far as their influence bears on the commencement of the history. When their operation seems to point to a stage of more maturity, this examination may be postponed to any other division of the narration, where the circumstances of that period appear to call for the application of such appropriate observations. This will be found to have been the usual practice of the best writers.* In the lives of professional characters, sometimes, it will be found useful to give a comprehensive view of the art, science, or branch, with which the professor may be connected; especially if he be considered as an inventor, reviver, or reformer, in such department. The interesting sketch of chemistry with which Melchior Adam introduces his Life of Paracelsus, may be offered as a fair example. A more ample display will be required

* See Plutarch;—Timoleon, &c. &c.

in cases of particular eminence ; and of which we shall have to say more in that part of the Essay which relates to professional biography.

In this place, we may be permitted to touch on the subject of Authorities, and the manner of presenting them to the reader. In this, as in most other matters relative to biographical composition, much will depend upon the discretion, taste, and judgment of the writer, and much on the nature and importance of his materials. Some biographers display their testimonials in the front of their works. Some affix their authority and proofs to the different circumstances as they occur ;—and where a case is disputed, or very doubtful, the particular evidence or testimony certainly should be given, *ad locum*, either in the body of the work, or in the notes. And others disclose the sources of their information in the conclusion or appendix. In whatever way this may be disposed, the great point to be insisted on is, that, at any rate, the authorities be produced : the historian, like Cæsar's wife, must not only be true, but incapable of being suspected. The second volume of De Ramsay's History of the Life of Turenne consists wholly of the original memoirs and writings on which the History is founded ; but he also gives a succinct account of those authorities, before he enters on his narra-

tive. This practice certainly carries some advantage with it. For, as the biographical studies, here recommended, have philosophical accuracy for their aim, confidence in the fidelity of the narrator cannot be too early established, in order to fix credit on the facts, and probability on the deductions.

SECT. II. PRELIMINARY CHARACTER.

It has been already remarked, that, in this—and indeed in every species of composition—the end proposed will decide as to the order and method of execution; and that it is not intended merely to follow the common chronological changes of life, but to trace the habits, pursuits, and circumstances, which serve to influence and constitute a precise and determinate character. In order, therefore, to accomplish this intention, especially if the character be marked by any great and leading set of peculiarities, it is recommended to commence the account of the life proposed with a brief, but exact delineation of the prevailing features,—and, if practicable, with a slight sketch of the original incitements, or acquired propensities, which led to such a characteristic distinction. By such a proceeding, we

shall have prefixed to our study a portrait, that will enliven our investigation, and interest our researches. Though we still follow the gradual stages of life, and, of course, receive the satisfaction attendant on regular progression, yet, guided by the light of general character, every intermediate step will be accompanied by new emotion, arising from the pleasure which the mind takes in tracing the links that unite cause and effect,—and from reaching a known and precise object, by a series of lively and concatenated circumstances.

Doctor Campbell, to whom biography owes so much, prefixes to his *Life of John Dee*—an animated, but miniature portrait. “*Joha Dee, a person famous in the sixteenth century for his extensive learning, more especially in the mathematical sciences, but withal extremely credulous, extravagantly vain, and a most deluded enthusiast.*” Now this gives the mind a determinate object for enquiry ; it commands into a certain track the volatile movements of the imagination ; it interests our contemplation, and gives light and direction to our researches into the nature of the whole character, then under inspection.

There is a *Life of the late amiable and philanthropic Thomas Day*, written in a perspicuous

and interesting manner, by his friend James Keir, commencing, also, with a lively and accurate likeness ; by which the attention is engaged, and the biographic spirit conducted with precision to every peculiarity and point of that patriotic character.

To bring the example nearer to the method proposed, let us venture to produce a reduced outline of the illustrious Bacon. "Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, a statesman and a philosopher. In the former character, servile, selfish, and inconsistent ; in the latter, luminous, liberal, and comprehensive. A pliant education, slavish times, a timid disposition, and early disappointments—and, proceeding from the influence of these circumstances, an unchangeable resolution of attaining power without much regard to the nature of the means, impressed his exterior character with meanness, prostitution, and ingratitude : whilst a vigorous intellect, a daring genius, and a self-depending perseverance, animated and enabled the powers of his mind to open the vast prospect of true philosophy ; displaying in one view the whole of natural science, at the same time inspecting the minutest divisions of the particular parts ; examining, in each, all that had been already known, and pronouncing, with intuitive decision,

what yet remained to be discovered." In short, a character, in some points, claiming our pity, as much as, in its higher powers, it challenges our admiration ; deterring by its fallibility on the one hand, and exhibiting an attractive example on the other ; culpably weak in all the active parts of life, and, as has been observed, glorious only in the contemplative.

The advantages to be derived from the delineation of these preliminary characters, seem to have been acknowledged with biographical emotion by Mr. Keir, in the work before-mentioned. And, indeed, so well has he taken up this part of our plan, that it cannot be resisted to conclude this section with his opinion of a practice so congenial to that offered in this Essay.—“ By means of the above sketch of Mr. Day's *Character*, it will not be difficult to trace the connection between that and his *Conduct* in the remaining part of his life ; and to observe how the latter flowed from the former : a connection so necessary to be observed and indicated in biography, though often omitted, that, without it, the detail of the actions of a man's life resembles rather the scattered fragments of a ruin, from which we cannot trace the original plan or design of the building—than the adjusted parts of a regular edifice.”

The mode of prefixing characters was an accession too interesting and advantageous to escape the vigilant eye of Plutarch. He makes frequent use of it ; but, perhaps, no where with more effect than in the Lives of Coriolanus and Fabius Maximus. And the sagacious Sallust, in his preliminary characters of Catiline and Jugurtha, has given us master-pieces of this manner.

SECT. III. PARENTS, ETC.

If the character be illustrious, the narrative should, certainly, take an account of the origin and ancestry. The love of ancestry is a passion natural to man, and is seldom decried, but when such an accession of hereditary eminence is wanting. Gibbon, on this head, remarks, " that our imagination is always gratified to enlarge the narrow circle in which nature has confined us : " and it is little less than defrauding a character of its attributes to omit any thing that may reflect on it either dignity or interest. Certain it is, that nobility, in its best sense, must be derived from a man's self—from the lustre of his own noble actions : but whether dignities and possessions have been acquired by the heroic or virtuous deeds of ancestry, or have been the effects of in-

dustry, chance, or even obliquity, their influence over the early habits, manners, and propensities, is so effective, that an omission in this point cannot be allowed. Families, too, have sometimes in them a RACE, which may claim the attention of the philosophic biographer ; and which is often strengthened by a peculiar mode of education. Machiavelli mentions this, permanent character found in different families : the Manlii always rigid and severe, the Appii ambitious and enemies to the people ; the Medici liberal patrons of literature and the arts ;—and many other examples might be added, if necessary, to prove the existence of a peculiar family spirit having influence on the characters of its component individuals. The kindred, then, the parents, with all their attributes and circumstances, as applying to the condition or education of the hero, will naturally claim regard in personal history.

As nothing should be omitted that may be considered as a source, however remote, of those impressions which originally give the character some of its principal directions, the duration of pregnancy and time of birth, if marked by any peculiar circumstances, accidental or designed, should be recorded and considered. For, as one of our chief aims is to gain an insight into the principles of the human character, we cannot too

soon commence our observations on the early and minute circumstances which set those principles into action.

It must be remarked,—and it is offered with great earnestness,—that, in this, as well as in most other positions suggested by the present Essay, the student is not only to accept the facts and observations, as matters establishing certain points of biographical philosophy, but also as examples or hints to deter, promote, or vary the treatment or conduct, on similar, or nearly similar, occasions. For the principal improvement to be derived from the study of biography, and especially from a treatise on that subject, should be such a practical application of the system, as would bear with advantage on the principles of education and conduct. Helvetius justly asserts, that education begins in the womb. Education is here taken in its proper and extended sense, as comprising every circumstance that has a tendency to excite the attention, form the manners, or interest the passions; and therefore must, necessarily, commence with the very rudiments of perception.

Permanent effects have been produced by impressions or accidents occurring to a pregnant woman. The murder of David Rizzio, if not in

the presence, certainly within hearing of Mary, queen of Scots—she then six months advanced in pregnancy with our James I.—is said to have impressed lasting effects on that timid monarch. Without entering on the disputed subject of the fanciful powers of a mother's imagination, many other instances might be advanced to induce us to believe, that impressions frequently occur in this period, the effects of which may influence, if not determine a character for ever; and that the treatment adopted on those occasions will bear attention and improvement. An observation, apt to our purpose, from Sir William Temple, may fairly close this view of the subject.—“The Indian Brachmans had a strain beyond all the wits of Greece, beginning their care of mankind even before the birth; and employed much thought and diligence about the diet and entertainment of their breeding women; so far as to furnish them with pleasant imaginations; to compose their minds and their sleep with the best temper, during the time that they carried their burthen.”

SECT. IV. BIRTH AND INFANCY.

The life of man naturally resolves itself into certain divisions, or periods, which, though indissolubly united with the progressive gradation of existence, have yet, in themselves, such a separate degree of wholeness, as will allow them to be traced distinctly; and, in some measure, even in an independent manner. Of these the birth and infancy claim our first attention. Many instances may be brought forward to prove, that circumstances attending the birth have so frequently led to important effects as to claim the attention of the philosophical biographer. One, however, though generally known, yet as put in practice by a personage of sound sense and clear penetration, and, as seeming to produce the effect intended, shall be adduced: it relates to the birth of the great Henry IV. of France. Henry D'Albret, his grandfather, made his daughter promise to sing a song to him while she was in her labour, in order, said he, "that you may bring me a child that will neither weep nor make wry faces." Her efforts to obey him were successful; and the child came into the world without crying. His grandfather rubbed his lips with garlic, and gave him a drop of wine to render his constitution strong and vigorous.*

* Prefixe.

The health, constitution, and apparent natural powers, next present themselves. On the personal organization, certainly, much of the future character depends ; not as, in itself, exclusively, directing the bent or force of the faculties, but as predisposing the individual to a more or less lively reception of certain impressions, and as naturally leading to peculiar desires and aversions. Sickliness, constitution, &c. do not directly form the mind, yet they may dispose it to a particular species of susceptibility ; they may lead to a certain cast of thinking ; they may influence choice and regulate exertion.

A temperament of ease and health, like the savage state, opposing no obstacles, or presenting few objects, will give the mind little opportunity for exertion or enlargement. On the contrary, nature combating with sickness, or surprised by accident, calls up powers, which, otherwise, might never have been brought into action. Sickliness or imbecility may also, from imperceptible variation in the circumstances, dispose to peevishness, to cowardice, to cunning, to envy, to malevolence : as, on the contrary, they sometimes produce gentleness and sensibility ; and, from the experience of external relief and tenderness, often lay the seeds of gratitude and all the

sympathetic affections. In like manner, deformity, from self-abasement, may lead to misanthropy and baseness; or, on the other hand, in order to balance, by conduct and mental acquisitions, what has been denied by personal advantages, may be disposed to amenity of manners, or a resolution of advancing in science and intellectual superiority. Where circumstances of this kind occur, and are warranted by the developement of the future character, they should not pass without the observation of the biographer. Well-founded instances of this sort will also serve, in an extended sense, to produce much good, by holding out the means and examples of repairing defects, alleviating disease, and converting imbecility into resolution. A numerous catalogue might be inserted here of some of the most eminent names in the annals of literature, whose infancy and youth have been embittered by the torments of sickness and the languors of debility: and other depressions,—which, by calling for incessant efforts to surmount lassitude, have gradually advanced into habits of industrious exertion,—might be easily produced. That facts and speculations of this kind merit the arrangement and induction of the personal historian, is countenanced by the practice of the profound Clarendon, who thinks it not out of the scope of his purpose to remark

upon the *diminutiveness* of some shining characters of his time : Lord Falkland, Sydney, Godolphin, John Hales of Eton, and William Chillingworth. He adds too, " it was an age, in which there were many great and wonderful men of that size."

Still keeping in view the principle of improvement, as well as of observation, we may, in this stage of the subject, cast a transient glance on the fostering and nurture of the infant stranger.—The all-wise and bounteous Creator has—in the most sacred characters, and by the very tenure of her being—stampd on the mother the obvious duty of furnishing her infant with that nutriment, which is inalienably his, by the immutable laws of nature and of God. This interesting topic, considered as a *duty*, does not, at present, come within the aim of our immediate purpose. But we must be permitted to enquire into the *fact*; as giving rise to a long and continued train of impressions, which lead to the most important consequences. We must be allowed to ascertain or deny the existence of that genial sensation, acting and re-acting between the parent and offspring with a deliciousness which mothers, actuated by the genuine feelings of nature, only know:—that reciprocal interchange of genial supply and grateful reception, producing, in regular and sweet gradation, all the benevolent and social

passions—filial affection, family attachment, friendship, love, patriotism, and extended philanthropy.

———Be the task of nature yours alone ;
Nor from a stranger let your offspring prove
The fond endearments of a parent's love :
So shall your child, in manhood's riper day,
With warm affection all your cares repay. *

The condition, temper, and treatment of the nurse, produce correspondent effects on the flexible disposition of the infant. Amongst the Lacedemonians, the office of *nurse* was esteemed of the highest importance, as commencing the business of education. Chrysippus, the Stoic, wrote precepts for the education of children ; and, as Quintilian tells us,† he even wrote a song to be used by nurses : well judging that the formation of character begins with the very commencement of perception ; and that the force or gentleness, the harshness or suavity, continuance, succession, and novelty, of these sensible impressions, dispose the tender organs into suitable modifications of habitual thought and action.

The circumstances now considered, with whatever else that from accident or design may lead

* See Roscoe's translation of "The Nurse, a Poem," from the Italian of Luigi Tansillo.

† Institut. Orat. Lib. I. cap. 10.

to future consequences, seem to embrace all that will offer materials to the biographér's observations, in the first and feeble stage of infancy.

SECT. V. CHILDHOOD.

The tender frame now advances towards consistency. The organs of sense are in tone to receive and transmit their respective objects and impressions ; and the increasing fabric begins to acquire ductility and powers to perform the functions of equipoise and loco-motion. In the exercise of these new acquirements, the faculties rise a stage higher in the scale of perception. The sense of the palate is more exquisite; colours, forms, and motions, excite more appropriate attention ; sounds and melody affect ; and matters of contact and surrounding temperature impress the organs with a keener sense of feeling. The whole frame, mental and corporeal, is now one tender mass of susceptibility. Every impression produces correspondent re-action. Repetition begets experience ; and experience brings forth discrimination and taste. From *things* the improving disposition advances to *persons*. Novelty awakens curiosity ; good offices inspire tenderness

and a desire to please ; and the propensity to imitation leads to the whole train of sympathetic affections.

From the painful uneasiness caused by hunger, and the pleasure received by the organs of taste in the gratification of the appetite, children are naturally gluttons. The circumstances attending upon their being supplied with what they desire so eagerly, will necessarily leave strong impressions. If the aliments be procured with difficulty, or be not administered in quantity sufficient for the appetite, a habit of *abject craving* may be produced ; or, by a little change in the circumstances, an *inventive and eager activity* to obtain what is considered so indispensably requisite. And this craving, or energy, long continued, may affect the whole character, in such a way, as to communicate a degree of meanness, or intensity, to the pursuit of other objects, as well as those so necessary to comfort and existence. On the contrary, food being supplied in profusion, and obtained without effort, the faculties, unexcited, will sink into languor and inactivity ; or will substitute other objects, neither so real or so interesting, for the exercise of the active powers. And from these various determinations of energy, opinions and habits may be formed, to influence the mode of acting in many of the principal

circumstances of life. Lycurgus did not think it beneath him to impress on the minds of the Spartans, the powerful effects derived from different modes of nutrition, by the example of two dogs of one litter, but differently brought up. He presented before them a mess of pottage, and a hare. The one reared in tenderness and profusion, and whose powers were never stimulated into exercise by the pain of want, slunk languidly to his pottage; whilst the other, who had hitherto allayed the cravings of appetite by the effects of his own exertions, sprung instantly after the hare, with all the skill and energy he had acquired from, what may be called, a contrary mode of education.

About this time, and seemingly deriving their existence from the natural constitution, the two great temperaments begin to make their appearance; the strong and impetuous motions of Choler, or the torpid and faint lassitude of what has been denominated Phlegm; which states of the constitution, if they do not altogether direct, certainly tinge and influence all the future movements of life. From these spring Activity and Indolence, Chearfulness and Gravity, Courage and Cowardice,—and a long train of habits, derived from each of them singly, or from the result of their various and infinite combinations.

Habitual sports and dawning propensities will now begin to indicate expectations of the future. When Francisco Guinigi first noticed the boy Castruccio,* he was attracted by the authority which the youth assumed over his young playmates, in prescribing such sports to them as suited his ardent disposition, as well as with the readiness and reverence with which he had inspired them in obeying his directions, and ministering to his inclinations ; all indicative of the future destiny of the prince, the warrior, and the hero. When we see young Franklin heading his troop of companions, or Sam Johnson carried on the shoulders of the submissive boys to school, a too presumptuous degree of subtility will scarcely be imputed to us, if we imagine that we prospectively behold the leader in science and in politics, as well as the future illustrious preceptor in morals and in literature.

Nor should we at this period omit the Tales that have amused, or the Songs that gave the first delight. These seeming trifles have not been disregarded by those best skilled in the philosophy of the human heart. Rousseau and Gibbon, two experienced self-investigators, speak feelingly of their efficacy and influence upon the

* Machiavelli's Life of Castruccio Castracani.

youthful imagination ; and acknowledge the lasting effects produced by these active engines upon the matured sensibility of their characters. Nor will these statements seem strange to any one, who is in the habit of retrogressively considering the circumstances which were present or active at the commencement of his dispositions and propensities ; and which have continued to influence his feelings in his adult condition,

The lasting impressions which are necessarily produced by the situation, character, and conduct of the Parents, will never be overlooked by the biographer or the student. The power arising from this relation determines the future more imperiously, perhaps, than any other ascendancy in the early stages of life and education. The varieties attending this intercourse are infinite in themselves and in their combinations, and they have an infinity of corresponding effects.

Without dwelling too long on the diversity of this complicated case, a few of the circumstances attending it may be noted ; such as—whether the parents are both alive ; what is their rank or condition in life ; whether they both concern themselves in forming the disposition, or, if one, (and which of them) take a less or a greater degree, or divide the care to separate points or different

departments ; their joint or individual characters, beheld as an example, or as applying to the mode of treatment. Are they severe, or are they indulgent ? Or, is one of them austere and the other lenient—or are they, sometimes, by turns, both lenient and austere ? If there be other relatives, whose authority or conduct may have influence, such must also be noted. A single parent, according to sex and character, will effect a peculiar disposition in the circumstances; so will an orphan state, with all the varieties of guardians and tutors, mixed with the characters, designs, and nearness of the relation. The examples in those cases are so numerous, and must be so generally known to every observer, that to produce, in this place, a few from the multitude, would seem an insult on the reader's understanding.

To the influence of parents, superintending relatives, or guardians, will naturally succeed the directions which the mind may take from the intercourse of brothers, sisters, or other equal inmates of the same family. If an only child, and reared solitary, it will be proper to note what may be the effects naturally flowing from such a situation ; and if these do not appear—what change in the circumstances, from the person's self, from those immediately connected, or, from surrounding objects, may have produced the difference. In the

case of more than one, we must investigate the ages and sexes of the relatives, and the peculiar influence generally attending on such distinctions. The number of brothers, &c. as well as their comparative ages,* will lead to such combinations of situation, temper, and interest, as must produce peculiar characteristics. To elucidate our manner, we will assume a case of three brothers of different ages, and, without noticing any other extraneous or modifying circumstances, imagine what distinct impressions might possibly take place *merely from that relative situation*. The elder would, for some time, be liable to those directions that are impressed on the character of an only child : the second, by the same mode of reasoning, would, in proportion to the distance of time between the births, have all the tender distinctions of a younger brother ; but, as the third advanced, he, the second, would stand in a double relation, to the eldest, and to the youngest. Thus, if

* The effects produced by disparity of years between brothers is appositely remarked by Plutarch, in his account of the celebrated Roman Patriots, Tiberius and Caius Gracchus ; and though his observation applies to the time of action, rather than to any similarity or distinction of character arising from the disparity, it will serve to shew that such cases have frequently a positive or negative effect on qualities and circumstances, and demand the attention of the inquisitive observer.

“Tiberius was nine years older than his brother ; consequently their political operations took place in different periods. This was a great disadvantage, and indeed the principal thing that prevented their success. Had they flourished together and acted in concert, such an union would have added greatly to their force, and perhaps might have rendered it irresistible.” *Plutarch : in Vit. Tib. Gracch.*

the eldest was lofty, energetic, and unyielding—and the youngest delicate, diffident, and susceptible—the second brother would, gradually, take a character between the two extremes: he would be prudent, impartial, and conciliating; tempering the immitigable firmness of the one with the unsuspecting softness of the other;—his characteristics would be moderation, equanimity, and justice. Nor is this wholly an imaginary or even an unfrequent case; several remarkable instances, very similar to the above, having come under the personal knowledge of the writer of this Essay; and others, of a like nature, have been obtained from sources of well-authenticated information.

This, it must be noted, is a situation, where it is known, or assumed, that the characters, from disposition and education, have taken a virtuous and amiable turn. For, barely changing the moral qualities will not alter the *generic* tendency which is acquired from proximity and local condition. Thus the case of three brothers—Edward, Richard, and George—may be assumed, where the minds are supposed, from circumstances and example, to have taken directions of an evil cast. The eldest, arrogant, tyrannical, cruel, and obstinate; the youngest, weak, timid, sordid, and cringing: then will the second be circumspect,

cool, malignant, and hypocritical. The attribute of Edward will be violence, of George pusillanimity, and of Richard dissimulation. The ingenious reader will naturally observe, that these cases may, sometimes, be varied and intermixed, as well in respect of general turpitude and excellence, as in the influence of the particular relations among themselves. What is aimed at here, is to draw the student's attention more minutely to the biographical principles, that unceasingly rise from mere situation and propinquity.

There are many other local relations, which produce effects, and which claim attention in this, as well as in the subsequent periods. The permanent consequences effected by a parent's unnatural partiality, or preference of one child to another, are too obvious, to stand in need of any illustration in this place. The vanity, malevolence, and weakness of the favourite, have been as conspicuous as the characters of envy, hatred, and violence—or of sagacity, independence, and courage, so generally marked on the discarded and neglected.

We also frequently see one enjoying some peculiar advantage, distinct from others of the same family. No matter of what nature it may be, whether personal, mental, or acquired, the

local condition is such, that appropriate effects must naturally follow. If he possess strength or beauty, if his abilities or learning be pre-eminent, if he be heir to title or estate,—in all these cases, the fear, the flattery, the admiration, and the respect of surrounding associates and attendants, will lay the germs of future passions; and they will have a reciprocal influence, as well on those who bestow, as on him who receives the adulation. *Nemo errat uni sibi, sed dementiam spargit in proximos accipitque invicem.**

Quitting the nursery and the parental chamber, our tender subject now timidly advances to the fellowship of coeval sports, and to the tumult and exercises of the formidable school. Curiosity now awakens all his faculties; every thing is new, every thing is impressive. Interesting objects call forth his powers. Motives stimulate him into pursuit; and the different dispositions, talents, and affections, of his new companions, lead to comparison, imitation, contest, and exertion. Inattentive to other circumstances, regardless of the past and of the future, every thing present impresses him with the keenest sensibility: and at this eventful period may be plainly discerned the passions rising from their embryo state into life and action.

* Senec. Ep. 94.

Here the situation becomes peculiarly interesting ; and should be considered, in a distinctive estimate, as respecting his natural abilities and circumstances in life, compared with those of his associates. In this tender season, many circumstances will produce impressions very different from what the same things might effect in a more advanced state of existence. If his companions be older, stronger, or more active than himself, conscious inferiority will engender fear and diffidence ; and if their superiority be founded in solid opulence or splendid appearance, self-comparison will end in abject servility or sordid baseness. If, on the other side, his condition be the reverse of this collocation, the contrary of all these impressions, will, generally speaking, be evidently distinguished.

Curiosity now arranges her objects ; self-interest adjusts their value ; and imitation selects examples. Where there exists no previous bias, shining and conspicuous characters, of every kind, will draw to them youthful attention ; and, according to the mode and degree of opportunity and repetition, they will be assumed as objects of regard, and an endeavour to resemble them will be excited. But it still oftener happens, that even in the foregoing stage of INFANCY, the mind may have contracted a disposition to be attracted by

one kind of qualities and appearances rather than by another. In such a case, the first view of the congenial semblance will allure the willing powers; and the character, so distinguished, will not only be admired and followed for that quality that first excited the attention, but, by association, all the other peculiarities of the model will concur in forming one general example—one shining standard of imitation.

Man is the creature of imitation. The propensity influences every stage of his being, every degree of his advancement; though, certainly, with less power on maturity of years and pre-eminence of intellect. But in this, as in every operation of nature—though the general laws be certain and imperative—limitations and modifying circumstances may be expected. Imitation, though it generally meet facility, sometimes encounters obstruction, and is always subject to local or incidental variety. The weak, and especially the young,* are the subjects of its powerful transmutations. In this early and interesting portion of existence, the tender and flexible disposition is generally presented with such a succession of miscellaneous, unconnected

* "At this time of life every thing is imitation; and I am convinced that there is not a single original idea in a man's head till he's of an age to propagate his species."—Kotzebue, speaking of himself; though it rather applies to adolescence than childhood.

objects, that the one frequently counteracts the impression made by the other. Curiosity has no time to examine, attention no interest to fix, and imitation—all susceptible as it is—looks for a permanency of attraction in vain : and, in this case, though the imitative faculty may find indiscriminate gratification, the subjects appear so promiscuous, and, in their effects, sometimes involved in such contrariety, as to fail in producing any lasting measure of tendency or preference. Under such circumstances are formed the every-day beings that are commonly launched into life, with characters—“ every thing by fits, and nothing long ;” and frequently so neutralised by the heterogeneous mixture of these discordant elements, as to present no character at all.

Such are the anomalies which frequently disturb the regular influence of this powerful principle. But, when the disposition is highly susceptible, and the object presented is wholly or in part congenial to an original or early-acquired tendency, the impression, in that case, may be so grateful, as to engross the feelings, faculties, and desires of the mind, to the exclusion of other surrounding incitements. The same effect may be produced,—if the cause of the excitement be in any high degree powerful, either from suddenness, magnitude, or extreme force ;—or, when,

from minute and undefinable circumstances, the impression has been so frequently repeated, that a gradual facility of reception has been contracted, and habit has passed into preference and determination.

Perhaps about this period we may remark on the gradual but lasting effects impressed upon the imagination and feelings by the nature and form of surrounding scenery. Time and place, though most essential points, are too little regarded in the details of biography. As the period of life, and even the season of the year,—and, still wider, the general state of the times—may claim attention, from their influencing or controlling an event or disposition under consideration; so the local situation, or place of residence, will dispose the mind to receive impressions that are, or by fanciful association seem to be, derived from a species of mental correspondence between appearance and conception. Thus the apparent variety of effects, produced by a residence in cities or in villages—in passing life among splendid buildings or among the rural scenes of nature—will claim distinct attention.

However the dwelling in crowds may contribute, by collision of multifarious intercourse,

to break down and soften the rough features of original character, it must, at the same time, be allowed, that by a residence in the capital, or seat of empire, the mind is enlarged by the importance of the transactions, and the magnificence of the objects that are continually presented by the mere circumstances of the situation. The heroic times of Greece and Rome will furnish ample instances of this local influence. The objects and circumstances daily presented, and the conceptions and dispositions incited by them, were all of magnitude and importance, whether the creatures of sensation or intellect. The citizens of these illustrious republics found themselves identified with the splendour which surrounded them. Their eyes were filled with the magnificence of their public buildings, and with the grandeur of their religious and military spectacles. Their meetings were amidst the crowds of the forum, to give their consent or refusal to institutions and decisions of the most vital and extended consequence. Their sports and shews were on the grandest scale, and commanded feelings of the most interesting nature, where life and death were the objects of public exhibition.

This union of moral and physical impression forms the basis of natural or acquired sensibility ;

and though mere situation, of itself, cannot create a faculty, it may have powerful influence in directing constitutional disposition, and in strengthening a sensibility once excited.

The interesting effects produced on the young mind, by the impressions received from rural scenery, have been noticed by those philosophers who have happily applied analysis to the intellectual powers as well as to the feelings of the heart. Seas, mountains, rivers, sublime views, picturesque scenes, groves, wilds, and cultivation, have all their specific characters, and impress upon the susceptible mind proportionate effects.

In the Earl of Buchan's Essay on the genius, character, and productions of Thomson, he attributes the poetic genius of that amiable writer to the impressions derived from the picturesque, pastoral, and romantic scenery, of Tiviotdale, where he passed his infancy and early youth. In Lord Buchan's own words, as corroborating our ideas on this head, it may be useful to adduce his sentiments.

"May it not be rationally supposed, that, without any predisposing circumstances in the bodily frame, a child will receive the impressions that are most conducive to that glorious combi-

nation of them (which when matured to permanent thought we call genius) in the country more readily than in town or villages, where every thing is too complex for their understandings." And again—"Will not an education less artificial and tending more to the spontaneous contemplation of NATURAL OBJECTS be more favourable to these attainments than the contrary? And would it not be properer to allow children to feed more upon their own thoughts, than on the thoughts and instruction of others?"

It has been remarked, and is here mentioned as a further practical testimony, that no country in Europe is more calculated than Switzerland to enrich the imagination of the poet with rural images. This has been applied to the advantages which the celebrated Gesner derived from romantic scenery between Zurich and Rapperschwil—scenery inviting the poet to the enchanting banks of the Sil and the Limmat, and producing correspondent effects upon the susceptible mind, that was there enjoying and studying the beauties of unsophisticated nature. In taking leave of these observations on local influence, it may be permitted to remark, that there is a permanent distinction between the disposition and taste formed by the beautiful, the wild, the romantic views of nature, and the order, delicacy, and

grandeur, imbibed by the constant view of the master-pieces of art, in architecture, sculpture, and painting.

To close :—we may venture to affirm, that there is no object, physical or moral, that can be presented to the conception at this susceptible period of life but will produce correspondent emotions ; and according to the nature, force, and duration of the excitement, and the aptitude, sensibility, and steadiness of the disposition, permanent habits, manners, and opinions, will be formed, affecting every aspect of the future conduct and character. For this reason it has been thought useful to dwell with such minuteness on this early adoption and disclosure of the views, motives, and incipient principles of moral action. In the more advanced stages of life, it will appear less necessary to dilate on the subject. Man, in his mature state, has been amply contemplated. His personal faculties, his moral condition, and his intellectual powers, have been respectively considered, and by writers of such qualifications and eminence, that it might be accounted as presumptuous, as it would be redundant, to go over the same ground.

SECT. VI. ADOLESCENCE.

In this delicate stage of advancement, the appearances grow attractive, and progression becomes visible. The mind begins to unfold and display its powers. Right and wrong, good and evil, are beheld with more distinctness, and call upon the fluctuating will for moral choice and action ; religion operates with increased influence, and leads the soul to feel the destiny and importance of its nature ; the passions commence their wild career with all the blandishments of attraction ;—in short, the whole frame is undergoing a complete change. The heart beats high, the spirits are buoyant ; every thing is new, every thing is perfect ; the present is enjoyed without fear, and hope smiles at the future in confident anticipation.

At the termination, or at the commencement of every period in the progress of life, or at any epoch, signalized by some important and leading train of events, it may be found of advantage to take a retrospective glance at the nature and process of what went before ; how much of the former state seems adapted to coalesce readily with the new ; or what essential changes are likely to take place in forming the character.

of the present condition. The gradual or the sudden nature of the transition must be noted : and no particular should be omitted, which can add a link to the connection of the two cases ; and no circumstance should be passed by, which may serve to distinguish one era from another.

For, though the life of man be generally defined as comprising a continued series of volition and action ; yet, even physically considered, it is found to be resolved into certain stages or periods ; all of which, in points and portions, may be adjusted on the chronological scale. But when grand and prominent changes occur, whether they be of a moral or temporal nature, they, also, claim from the biographer a distinct notice, and command such a pause of separate attention, as the importance and duration of their effects may seem to deserve.

On the occurrence of such epochs, besides the consideration of the immediate change, some biographers have found advantage in recapitulating the character of the hero up to that period ; and, as practised by Clarendon * and other acute inquirers, even taking a glance at the characters of his contemporaries, and of the situation of the

* In the account of his own Life.

times and manners, which might, in any shape, bear on, or influence his disposition and conduct. And for this reason, as well as in order to keep the attention from being exhausted by the tediousness of a continued narration, many have found it useful to their purpose to separate the composition into grand and sub-divisions, such as books, chapters, and sections. But it should be noticed, that these compartments are not to be laid down as mere segments, or as if they were divided by a scale of equal parts after the work was completely finished : on the contrary, they must, each of them, appear to be a perfect and connected portion of the work ; having an interesting commencement, and concluding with such a consequential period, as may not only give an interval of rest, but also an opportunity of reflection, to the observing reader.

By the assistance of such resting places—allowing time for the recollection of the past, and indicating precise direction to the future—the itinerary of life may be precisely marked. The contemplation will be aided by the systematic distribution of the respective parts ; and the biographical prospect will be improved by these distinct and regular views of the different stages of infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Under this regulated point of aspect, we shall be enabled

to observe the whole course of action, with all the distinguishing marks of progression and advancement; gradually presenting new objects,—and, by change and advancement of the state, condition, and the relation with surrounding circumstances,—superinducing an increased or improved set of appetites, passions, and affections; similar to what is observed to take place in the stages of transition from barbarism to civilization, in the general history of mankind.

The first article that meets us in this portion of our process is the interesting and important business of education.—Education, taking it in its general, and indeed genuine sense, has been properly defined “That series of means, by which the human understanding is gradually enlightened, and the dispositions of the heart are formed and called forth, between earliest infancy and the period when we consider ourselves as qualified to take an active part in life.”

Under such a comprehensive notion, every circumstance, which from incident or design may influence, or be present at, the unfolding of the youthful faculties, becomes an object of high consideration, and takes an important position in this more extensive view of the subject. But, as a great portion of this Essay has been humbly

devoted to the attempt of exploring, and, where it appeared possible, of assisting in the development and improvement of the powers of the youthful mind—more, on that head, need not be added in the present instance.

It is, however, necessary, in this part of the process, that we should call upon the writer or student to direct his attention to that branch of education, which appertains to the school and the progress of literary acquisition. The many and elaborate works on the subject of scholastic education, that have been offered to our serious and practical perusal, might allow us barely to refer to such popular productions, and pass on to the other subjects of the section: but, though no new lights can be advanced on this interesting topic, it does not appear consistent with the purpose in hand to throw it wholly by, without some observation.

The first matter (especially in a biographical point of view) which seems to call for reflection, is, the long contested point—whether literary and other advantages are best obtained from having the early part of the education administered by a private tutor, or in the bustle and emulation of a public school?

With regard to private education, in order to do it justice, and allow it all the merit it may seem to claim, we must admit, under this head, the advantages that may be derived from the superintending vigilance and skill of a judicious parent—from a relative who has understanding enough to comprehend the actual application of principles to circumstances, and who has the most powerful of all motives to put his knowledge into practical execution. In this fortunate case, science is directed to subjects always within reach of the experiment, and precept is melted into the advices of paternal affection.

There is infinite difference between the speculations of the recluse philosopher—drawing his aphorisms from the learning obtained by books or distant observation on the nature and progress of the human mind—and the conclusions of the scientific parent, who can apply the general principles of general nature to the actual condition of the young objects immediately before him, and under the influence of his practical discipline and experiment. The detached, but accurate maxims thrown out by Mr. William Burdon, (a parent of the above description) in his ingenious literary "THOUGHTS," have in them more of solid, practicable application than can be derived from voluminous didactic treatises,

founded on arbitrary theories, and deficient in the advantages of actual experiment and patient induction.

Private education, like all human institutions, has also its disadvantages. The want of mixing in the sports, contentions, and emulation of a public seminary, often leaves the youthful mind in a state of torpid imbecility. This narrow circle of thinking and acting, though it may not absolutely exclude the energies of perseverance and self-estimation, will frequently render the manners in some measure untractable—if not decidedly timid, certainly unsocial.

A solitary or sequestered mode of living will, in all stages of existence, produce suitable effects on the disposition and conduct. What has been remarked on the subject, by those who draw effective consequences from each condition in which man can be placed, will especially apply to that ductile state, in which every circumstance and every situation leave sensible marks of the impression.

Clarendon, in remarking upon the character of John Digby, first Earl of Bristol, makes the following applicable observation. "He was a man of great parts and a wise man; yet as he

had been, for the most part, single, and by himself in business, *and had lived little in consort*, he was passionate and supercilious in council; and did not bear contradiction without much heat.”*

A secluded mode of education, by preserving the mind from multiform and extraneous distractions, often condenses the powers to the track of a single passion or pursuit, which in such case unites powers, that would be otherwise diffused over a variety of objects.

We thus frequently perceive that the particular object selected, or offered by design or accident to the youthful choice, will generally attract the undivided attention of the aspirant, to the exclusion of every other aim or purpose: and the pursuit, thus narrowed, will call forth persevering though limited powers, and form a character obstinate in advancement, and confined in the selfishness of its views.—“Private education isolates young men too much. It accustoms them too much to look upon themselves as the centre of attention. It gives them too much

* The man who languishes in retirement, and rusts, as it were, in obscurity, always requires to be roused and pushed on; or he takes an opposite turn and swells with vain conceit; for the man who never compares himself with another, naturally overvalues himself.

Quintil., L. I. c. 2.

self-love. It neither inspires them with the social virtues, nor excites any degree of emulation, and estranges them from every notion of the common good.*

The other form of education, by opening the young mind to all the impressions of a mixed community, will seem calculated to create a disposition to frankness, courage, comprehension, and a taste for social enjoyment. Public exhibition, and continued calls on sympathy, will naturally produce freedom of manners and liberality of sentiment. In the petty contentions of the form, and the more extended ones of the school, fearlessness and presence of mind will be acquired; the order pervading the common system will regulate, as its variety will extend, the views and the judgment; emulation will urge the pace of ambition, while frequent comparison will moderate the pretensions of self-opinion; and the communion of sports, exercises, and interests, will lay the foundations of generosity, friendship, and the propensity to social enjoyments. On the other hand, the superintendence being general, vigilance cannot be omnipresent; and the direction of particular cases may pass away unrestrained and unobserved. Plodding

* Cambalusier.

perseverance, and the sudden energy, called into action by procrastinated study, passing in the crowd for application and genius, may, for the want of being properly noticed, sink into dulness or be inflated into vanity. Conscious inferiority will bring servility or cunning; and repeated failure, and the exhibition of the successful advancement of others, will terminate in the torpor of despondence or the workings of envy. The character is broken from its originality by collision; desultory habits and manners are contracted by perpetual changes in the objects of imitation. Sensuality increases by contagion; licentiousness is encouraged by example; the rudiments of all the passions are called into play; and the seeds of vitious tendency are laid and nourished by general communication and concerted concealment.

It is left to those, who professedly treat on the subject, to sum up the advantages and disadvantages, generally attending upon these opposite modes of scholastic education; and to draw, from the comparison, a conclusive judgment in favour of the one, or of the other.

Examples might be readily collected, which might, to demonstration, elucidate the good and the bad effects of both. It is sufficient for our

biographic purpose, that we advert to the importance of attending, not only to the quantity and nature of the learning and other improvements acquired at this time of life, but also to the circumstances accompanying the mode by which they are administered ; especially, when these circumstances are likely to produce sensible effects upon the yielding disposition.

In examining this contested subject, we may, for the present purpose, take into view, only the *beneficial* consequences, which have often accrued from each of these different ways of supplying the youthful mind with literary or general knowledge ; and in this point of view can see reason to account for many discriminating traits of character, derived from the influence of these different forms. In elucidation of this, the contemplation of two shining examples might be offered to the ingenuity and penetration of the inquisitive student. The examples proposed for such an experiment, are no less than those of two well-known, illustrious, and once rival statesmen. Personages, who, from two such opposite channels of improvement, seemed to draw forth all that was valuable in their different courses—every thing that could improve the faculties, exalt the views, and fix the stamp of decision on their respective characters.

Without, at all, entering into such examination, but, at the same time, fully conceiving what an illustration of the subject might be derived from such a study, we shall proceed, barely to advance the pre-eminent names of Pitt and Fox.—The first had his early culture at home, under the vigilant superintendence of an accomplished and discerning father : the other had his first impressions and efforts given to him amongst a crowd of compeers and competitors. Mr. Pitt's early education was under a private tutor,* at his father's seat at Burton Pynsent ; and he was not taken from that situation until he was of a proper age to enter on his public career of life at Cambridge. On the contrary, Lord Holland decidedly gave the preference of a public to a private mode of tuition : and, under this conviction, sent his son Charles Fox, at an early age, to the bustle and competition of Westminster school ; from whence, in due time, he was transferred to the higher range of fellowship and emulation at Eton, previous to the finishing of his education at Oxford.

The character of the tutor is too material in the great business of education to be wholly omitted, or even to be but slightly regarded. His influence, on the moral as well as literary

* The Rev. Mr. Wilson,—afterwards Doctor, and Canon of Windsor.

"course of advancement, is generally important enough to call for distinct notice ; and where the future eminence of the pupil has to become conspicuous, it would seem an act of injustice to pass over this stage of improvement, without giving due attention and praise to the character of the preceptor. It also becomes necessary, to the practical utility of biographical composition, to regard, with due attention, those cases, where the mode of education, or the personal character of the tutor, seems to have produced untoward or, as sometimes happens, even contrary effects from that which, in common circumstances, might have been reasonably expected.

Much discussion and many examples might be brought forward, in proof of the importance that should be attached to this view of the subject. The independent manners and rigid discipline of the celebrated George Buchanan, in his tuition and education of James the sixth, of Scotland (first of England)—with their effects on the mind of that feeble and pedantic monarch—will offer some useful studies on the nature and incidental variety of the impressions communicated to the pupil by the character and governance of the preceptor. The no less illustrious Fenelon may supply similar materials for biographical research, in the vigilant superintendence and mi-

nute exactness made use of by him in the education of the Duke of Anjou—afterwards King Philip the fifth, of Spain. And the references, drawn from a philosophical survey of this very case, are so accurately exhibited in one of our recent literary journals, that, without apology, they may be fairly offered as an authorised proof of the practicable nature of the suggested studies.

In describing the system adopted by Fenelon, for the occasion above alluded to, the learned writer proceeds——“But the plan had the ordinary defect of systems of education contrived or conducted by persons more than commonly scrupulous and rigorous, who aim so eagerly at the banishment of faults, that they are apt to weaken the principles of excellence,—and who generally at last produce a feeble, timid, useless innocence, instead of the vigour and resolution necessary for the common duties of life, or of those magnanimous virtues which are often mixed with considerable faults, but which alone are capable of rendering signal and splendid services to mankind.”*

Our *companions* are our first tutors. The examples are so near, and the propensity to copy

* Edinburgh Review, Vol. XXI. Part I. p. 187 :—on Coxe's Memoirs of the Spanish Bourbons.

so strong, that the whole of youth is one continued act of imitative adoption. The distance between age and adolescence is too great to cause either attachment or imitation. Virtue, as well as talents, is generated in the active intercourse of associates and competitors; and from the excitements, produced by this communion, arise the rudiments of all that is operative and interesting in the future man. In dwelling upon this early state of social intercourse, many distinctions of importance offer themselves to the consideration of the biographer. The disparity of age, rank, personal qualities, and intellectual endowments, will effect suitable impressions on the yielding disposition: so will also the relation in which the young subject stands with his associates—as consisting of neighbours, brothers, other relatives, or perfect strangers.*

The seeds of the passions, implanted in the breast of every human being, are drawn forth to maturity by the influence of incidental circumstances, which have a peculiar power of exciting

* "It has been observed of those children who owe their nurture and education to a certain benevolent institution in this metropolis, that being by their misfortune strangers to those charities that arise from the relations of father, son, and brother, their characters assume a complexion that marks their conduct through life." And, extending the principle, it is added—"The same may be said of Savage; and will perhaps account for that want of gratitude to his benefactors, and other defects in his temper, with which he seems to have been justly chargeable." *Hawkins' Life of Dr. Johnson.*

rather the growth of one species than of another, according to the condition of the circumstances and nature of the susceptible subject. This disposition to be actuated by the impulses of surrounding objects, according to their several properties and associations, will induce the biographer to give a due attention to the condition and qualities of matters bearing so important an agency in the business of unfolding and determining the principles of the future character. Therefore every discriminating circumstance in this fellowship of intercourse and education demands from the observer patient thought and discerning appropriation.

The peculiar personal characters of these, our compeers in moral advancement and literary progress, are too essentially linked with the whole process of forming the permanent system of thought and action to be passed over without the necessary examination ; and have an indispensable claim on the peculiar attention of both the man who undertakes to write the life of another, and of him who engages in the study of general biography as a science.

This salutary practice has been most profitably attended to by Lord Clarendon, in the history of his Life. He makes excellent remarks on the

companions of his youth, and of the habits and principles he derived from such intercourse. He gives full-drawn characters of his associates; and these he judiciously divides into three distinct classes—his acquaintance whilst only a student—his more intimate friends—and, his friends in his profession. These, especially the latter, were the most eminent men of their day; and of all he has given succinct and impressive characters. The early companions, the youthful connections and friendships of Thomas Day, with the effects produced by them on his amiable disposition, are happily introduced in Dr. Kippis's well-written Life of him in the *Biographia Britannica*; as well as by his friend Keir, in the elaborate account his affection has prompted him to draw of that excellent character.

About this time frequently occur these accidental circumstances, which, though they do not create a peculiar genius, (that being the happy result of attention, taste, and application) yet do very often determine those faculties, whose direction, by a different casualty, or even by a skilful management of relatives or tutors, might have been bent into a contrary track. Biography has furnished us with many instances of this sort; and where they can be investigated they should be noticed, not only as tracing the course of a

passion or pursuit from its original source, but as affording an indication of what may be discreetly presented to youthful curiosity, in order to attract the ductile spirit into a projected line of direction. The examples are too numerous, and too familiar to every general reader, to admit that we should intrude a selection here.

Among the various objects which have an influence in the way that we are remarking upon, there is one class peculiarly productive of these effects; and that consists of such Books (foreign to those imposed by the system of education) as are casually or purposely presented; and which, by their novelty and perhaps sympathy with some hitherto unexcited powers, raise up propensities, and, in a vigorous or susceptible mind, urge and determine to a certain course of thought and action—perhaps to ardent adventure and successful eminence.

Religion, if in its peculiar circumstances it offer any incipient or permanent distinction to biographic notice, must be reverentially attended to. The discipline of the seminary, with regard to freedom or strictness of regulation, together with the nature of the exercises, amusements, and periods of vacation, may, at times, supply matter for reflection, and objects for ex-

ample. And, after all, in this, as in every other period of the process, unexpected circumstances will arise, often calling the biographer from his adjusted prospectus of regular cases to new instances, claiming, from their importance, even a higher degree of consideration.



SECT. VII. YOUTH,

Many of the points, supposed to be established at the time of life bounded by the last section, will continue their influence in the advanced stage, which is the subject of the present ; and some of them, owing to occasional variation in the circumstances, will not commence their operation before this period. But these are fluctuations, which, not occurring unfrequently, are easily noted and adjusted.

The personal qualities now disclose themselves, and generally take some share in modifying, if not in fixing the character. It has been said, that a peculiar form of body is invariably accompanied by a peculiar disposition of mind. However this may hold good in a comprehensive view of animated nature, all that is aimed at, in this place, is to take a transient view of the natural gifts or

defects of the person, and to make some observations on the sensible effects which have accrued from such conformation. And in this enquiry, in order to avoid repetition, it is our wish to be understood, that the intended remarks are not meant to be confined to the present period, but extended to every portion of our being, where personal attributes are likely to produce effects upon the disposition and conduct.

It is foreign to the purpose of this disquisition to touch upon the physical power, which, from the nature of their union, the body continually exercises upon the mind; our business upon the present occasion is to trace the *moral influence* proceeding from such connection.

In commerce with the world it is well understood, even by common observers, that the person, the voice, and the manner of a man, are productive of very sensible effects upon the minds and behaviour of others. This, in itself, is worthy of the biographer's attention. But, on looking a little closer, it will be found that such endowments (and the same may be said of their contraries) will have a powerful share in influencing the character of the possessor himself. Strength, stature, beauty, dignity of aspect, gracefulness of manners, and a sweet or a commanding voice,

are favourable gifts of nature, and should be recorded, together with the consequences, personal or extraneous, which may have been derived from them.

Vigour of body, a dignified presence, and a sonorous voice are powerful requisites to obtain respect; but they also, sometimes, impress the possessor with too lofty a sense of personal advantages, to the exclusion of those mental accomplishments, which are not only of an higher order, but are also of a more permanent duration. Considering them according to either case, they have too much weight in justly appreciating a character to be passed by neglectingly.

There is a picture of this kind by that master-artist the Lord Clarendon, which, as applying to the subject in hand, may bear an insertion: it is of the accomplished Sir Kenelm Digby, and done in the historiographer's usual happy manner.—“He was a man of a very extraordinary person and presence, which drew the eyes of all men upon him, and which were more fixed by a wonderful, graceful behaviour, a flowing courtesy and civility, and such a volubility of language as surprised and delighted; and though in another man it might have appeared to have somewhat of affectation, it was marvellous grace-

ful in him, and seemed natural to his size and mould of his person, to the gravity of his motion, and the tune of his voice and delivery."

These natural excellencies are always to be considered in conjunction with the circumstances of disposition and culture; these may either aid them in a beneficial display of their advantages, or may sink their qualities into a contrary state of perversion. The exuberances, in their very nature, will sometimes degenerate, whilst deficiency, all susceptible, is continually adding to, and ameliorating what it already possesses. It has been acutely, but justly, remarked, that, "vigour might increase so far as to produce mental torpor, and weakness of body be connected with that mobility, which is often united to the fervours of imagination, and the brilliancies of genius."*

But that the attention may not be distracted by putting the case in too general a way, it may be useful to converge our observations on one distinct instance, which, with its attributes, has often been a subject of contemplation, and which may help to illustrate the operation of the principles, by the mode and aptitude of the application.

The proposed subject is **HEIGHT OF STATURE**, with its concomitants—contrasted by particulars resulting from observations on those of a contrary dimension. And this may, for the present, serve in place of the many conditions of contrast, that have been made subjects of study—such as strength, beauty, symmetry, alertness, pleasing or sonorous voice, &c. with their opposites—imbecility, ugliness, deformity, sluggishness, &c.—all of which, as contrasts, will in principle associate with the instance under present contemplation.

Tallness, from its very nature, gives a certain cast to the mien, which, operating on those with whom an intercourse is held, and the effect recoiling upon the possessor, must produce a peculiar turn of thinking, according to the natural disposition or acquired habits of the person. By attention to the workings and effects of this process,—in education much of the good it presents may be increased, and much of the evil tendency, when detected, may in other cases be prevented. So, also, in study, many seeming incoherencies, as well as many determinate points of character, may be traced to the windings from that source. Nothing that appertains to the person but will affect the mind. The very cloathing and adornment, as well as the form and constitu-

tion of the body, impress the intellect with associate modes of thinking and acting.

Height of figure will give dignity and stateliness ; and sometimes superciliousness and pride. This quality, like beauty and strength, has its opposite,—producing contrary, and often rival effects.

A low stature, in its first aspect and feeling, stamps a kind of an impression of inferiority ; and where this is not counteracted by mental effort, will leave the character, both in estimation and self-consciousness, degraded by a sensation of insignificance, servility, and meanness. When, from emulation, ambition, or philosophy, the mind forms a resolution to bear up against this personal disadvantage—effort, application, and perseverance, frequently produce the most shining effects ; and sometimes, on the contrary, the disposition degenerates into characters of envy, suspicion, cunning, and malevolence.

In reviewing the operation and consequences of this contrast, we very often see the stately personage depend upon the appearance solely for all the claims of expected deference and notice ; whilst the diminutive figure, from acquisitions of art, literature, or virtue, and from the activity and

confidence grounded on these solid advantages, rises into eminence, and commands that respect and admiration, which the personal loftiness of the other had tried to extort in vain.

Where there is a spirit to bear up and rise against the disadvantages of fortune or of nature, every effort will be tried, every substitute will be adopted, to counteract the evil or cover the privation. Nothing will be left unattempted which can serve to turn the sufferer's own attention from the painful feeling, or to palliate the appearance in the eyes of others.

Aristotle, though his mental powers could well place him far above the contempt of others, or the possibility of his own self-abasement, yet fell into the weakness of those who had not his rare intellectual endowments to make up for the irregularities of personal deficiency. He was said to be of a short stature, eyes remarkably small, his limbs disproportionably slender, and lisped or stammered in his speech. To balance these defects, he was not content to depend on the weight of his almost super-human talents, but attempted to compensate for his ungracious figure, by the finery and elegance of his dress;—his mantle splendidly adorned, his fingers loaded with valuable rings, and both his head and face shaved, while the other scholars of Plato re-

tained their long hair and beards.* But, as Doctor Gillies properly remarks upon the matter, in him this was a mere accessory, which neither altered his character nor weakened his ardent passion for knowledge.

Bacon says, that deformed persons seek to rescue themselves from scorn by malice and boldness ; but we see the greater part of them destroy the very notion of defect by a resolute pursuit of perfection in intellectual acquirements. The sickly, the diminutive, and the deformed have, perhaps, been beholden for their excellence to their apparent misfortune ; and Pascal, Pope, Boileau, and Scarron, have exhibited mental powers as unimpaired and as exalted as if they had been seated in a frame the most happily constructed and robust.

There is no state or condition of a corporeal nature, against which the powers of a vigorous mind will not be able to prevail, and even to turn the seeming disadvantage into moral profit. The *indelibles*, (as Lord Bacon terms them) deformity, bastardy, emasculation itself, may lose their ignominy ; deficiency may be supplied by succedaneous faculties, and the appearance of imperfection

* Diogen. Laert. in Aristot.

lost in the splendour of superior talent: and even the reproachful state of the latter horrid degradation has been snatched from infamy, and is almost atoned by the masculine energy and abilities of the general Narses.

In assistance to the studies of those who may wish to go farther into this interesting topic, mention may be made of a tract on *bodily deformity*, written by a person, himself deformed, the ingenious William Hay, Esquire.* In his discussion he considers—1. the natural consequences of bodily deformity,—2. how it affects the outward circumstances, and—3. what turn it gives to the mind: all which considerations he has treated in a feeling and discriminative manner. For, having always a ready opportunity of application to his own sensibility, and having examined what has been advanced on the subject by the conjecture or observation of others, he brings to view a very fair exhibition of the case in all the physical disadvantages, as well as all the moral bearings, favourable or detrimental, that may arise from the general or peculiar nature of the circumstances.

In returning to what relates more exclusively to the purport of this section, it might be pro-

* In a publication entitled, "Fugitive Pieces."

per to resume the topic of education ; and mark, in this stage of its advancement, what, in its progress, it may have added, taken away, or altered in the general character. The mode and substance of education, in all its stages and varieties, have employed the attention of the most eminent inquirers, scientific and practical : all that falls within the scope of our purpose is, to observe, whether the nature of the scholastic exercises, the manner of pursuing the studies, or the seat of learning itself may not have peculiar circumstances attending them, such as are apt to impress the mind with certain tendencies of thought and inclination. For, it is to be noted, that the present matters under contemplation have not relation to improvement in literature, or the different modes by which learning may be most successfully administered. These subjects are not deficient : they have been copiously discussed and are accessible to all. The aim in this place is to direct the attention to the more general yet subtle distinctions of mental energy, which, from their intensity or remission, pliability or firmness, influence the manners and conduct through the whole term of existence. The habits of attention or indolence, of sanguine anticipation or listless despondence, of ready apprehension or slow discernment—these, as impressing lasting characters on the mind and con-

duct, are what should engage the biographer's distinct examination.

The early quickness with which learning is imbibed is not always the indication of permanent ability. Facility of acquiring does not, in general, establish a power of retention : whilst what is received with labour and difficulty is frequently preserved and meliorated. That extraordinary person, known by the name of Psalmanazar, was gifted with a remarkable aptitude of acquiring the elements of literary knowledge ; but the very facility of imbibing indisposed him from the perseverance necessary to digest and improve his attainments ; and his career became marked with assumed claims of excellence he did not possess, and the most visionary ostentations of romantic vanity.—In contrast to characters of this mercurial cast is to be placed the class of those slow, but diligent personages, who deliberately pursue their undeviating course, and retain with tenacity what they have acquired by labour. Cato, the younger, at the period of his education, proved dull, and slow to apprehend what was offered to him ; but that deficiency was happily balanced by his possessing a strong power of application and perseverance ; so that what he once conceived, he very faithfully retained. Doctor Robertson, in charac-

terizing the emperor Charles V. gives a complete example of the class before us. "In forming his schemes, he was by nature, as well as by habit, cautious and considerate. Born with talents which unfolded themselves slowly, and were late in attaining maturity, he was accustomed to ponder every subject that demanded his consideration, with a careful and deliberate attention."

In the preceding part of this work a synoptical table of biographical materials has been presented. To dwell upon every article inserted there would swell our essay into volumes; and would be as ineffectual as tedious. The judicious writer or student will know what importance to attach to the several relative positions that are exhibited; and, according to the quantity and matter, will give them suitable attention. They all have influence in themselves, or in their combinations; yet were we tempted to pause upon this occasion, it should be to consider the nature and importance of the consequences proceeding from the intimacies of friendship, the struggles of competition, the intercourse with female society, the assistance derived from patronage, and the obstructions or miscarriages that invigorated or diminished resolution.

SECT. VIII. MANHOOD.

The circumstances which surround him, and the condition in which a man finds himself, on his entrance into active life, operating upon his moral and intellectual peculiarities, are generally effectual in fixing the permanent constitution of the mind and conduct: at least, in all common instances, this is usually the case. His rank in life, the state and nature of his revenue, the condition and character of the society he mixes with, the career or profession opened to him,—and, above all, the form and institutions of the existing government, together with the opinions and manners resulting therefrom—these determine the future distinction of his mental qualities, and, altogether, form and stamp upon him the personal identity of a specific character.

Such, in ordinary cases, is the general operation of local and temporary circumstances upon the sentiments, the passions, and the morals, of men on their initiation into the functions and duties of an active commerce with the world. But where a mind of high active powers, fostered by progressive or incidental advantages, emerges from the schools or college upon its public range of life, the exalted spirit of its character will resist

the influence of times and situation, and afford the biographer the more grateful task of tracing the independent energies of genius and the bold aspirations of inventive originality.

After having appreciated the character, as thus modified by incident and situation, or as established by native strength of mind and powers of original conception, the series of opinions, purposes, and pursuits, essential to this active portion of existence, is open to our contemplation; and will be surveyed with more or less diligence, as the several points seem to be more or less intimately associated with the prevailing habits and local condition of the subject. Some of these points, which, as matters of biographical study, seem to have been but slightly handled, may, in the way of specification, be just touched on here.

An account of the changes produced by the effects of domestic or foreign Travel, on a person's manners and sentiments, will claim a share of interest and consideration from the delineator as well as the student. The space which Travels should occupy in the history of a man's life, may be regulated by their duration and extent, the end for which they were undertaken, the importance of the occurrences, and the consequences resulting from the whole. Of this estimate, the

objects in view of the traveller most commonly decide : for when the mind is bent towards an exclusive set of observations, it will be sure to dwell only on that class of notices originally proposed for examination and enjoyment.

Some enter on an unprepared course of travels, merely as a measure appertaining to their rank ; and, after the unprofitable rapidity of a tour, return with a vague notion of indiscriminate objects, and without any accession of information or improvement. Some travel to observe what is rare or valuable in the different countries, the beauties or uncommon varieties of situation, the curious productions of art, and the venerable remains of antiquity ; and some few with an intention of profiting by the interesting novelty of foreign example, by the various aspects to be taken of strange habits, manners, and institutions,—or by a judicious purpose (as is recorded of Cicero, in his travels*) of taking advantage

* This voyage of Cicero seems to be the only scheme and pattern of travelling, from which any real benefit is to be expected : he did not stir abroad, till he had completed his education at home ; for nothing can be more pernicious to a nation, than the necessity of a foreign one ; and after he had acquired in his own country whatever was proper to form a worthy Citizen and Magistrate of Rome, he went confirmed by a maturity of age and reason against the impressions of vice, not so much to learn as to polish what he had learnt by visiting those places, where arts and sciences flourished in their greatest perfection. In a tour the most delightful of the world, he saw every thing that could entertain a curious traveller, yet stayed nowhere longer than his benefit, not his pleasure, detained him. By his previous knowledge of the

of every opportunity to assist in perfecting those studies, which perhaps at first suggested the peregrination.

There is much travel in modern times ; but men are apt to visit foreign regions full of prejudices in favour of their own country, its customs, religion, political establishments, and presumed superiority. They look with a doubtful and suspicious eye on every thing which does not, in some degree, assimilate with this imaginary, assumed standard ; and, wrapt up in inflexible partiality, close all the avenues of liberal observation, and by their obstinate perverseness forfeit every opportunity of rational comparison and eventual improvement.

The moral biographer, when called upon to give a judgment on this effective topic, may pronounce, that the perfection of travelling is distinguished, when the prejudices of national

laws of Rome, he was able to compare them with those of other cities, and to bring back with him whatever he found useful, either to his country or to himself. He was lodged wherever he came, in the houses of the great and the eminent ; not so much for their birth and wealth, as for their virtue, knowledge, and learning ; men honoured and revered in their several Cities, as the principal Patriots, Orators, and Philosophers, of the age : these he made the constant companions of his travels : that he might not lose the opportunity even on the road, of profiting by their advice and experience : and from such a voyage, it is no wonder, that he brought back every accomplishment, which could improve and adorn a man of sense."

Middleton's Life of Cicero : Vol. I. p. 48.

habits are subdued, without giving up any portion of local attachment or honest patriotism : when acute perception of the differences and agreements of national manners, institutions, pursuits, disabilities, and advantages, may furnish to the liberal observer that comprehensive science, which, regarding not the partial misrepresentations of age, country, or persuasion, speaks a universal language, interesting and intelligible to all.

It will here become necessary to consider distinctively the popular condition of the personage under inspection—that is, his relative situation with the public ; in order to give increased attention to the subject, when the importance of its character associates with, or is directed by the great events which are forming matter for the page of general history.

When the hero of the story, by his conspicuous station, by his political agency, or his pre-eminent military talents, takes a distinguished part in directing or influencing the great affairs of nations, then biography rises to the exalted level of history ;—and the connections and pursuits of the man will embrace the transactions and public history of his country and its extended relations. But even in this exalted view, the principal

figure must be kept ostensibly before us, and care taken that the individual character be never lost in the crowd of surrounding circumstances. For as it is found that even the scenes of general history cannot be exhibited with intelligence and utility, without dwelling on the distinct and private characters of the principal actors, much less should the professed LIFE of a single being be overpowered by the profusion of cotemporary incidents, which, however brilliant and interesting in themselves, throw no light on the character, designs, or connections of the personage, whose track, by the title of the work, we are engaged to follow, and whose very nature we are endeavouring to investigate.

A just delineation of the happy union and relative influence of public circumstances and individual powers is the great *desideratum* in this species of the higher biography;—and, in this desirable way of considering eminent characters connected with the passing circumstances of the times, Plutarch, as far as his materials will allow, is a perfect model. In this kind of biography, it must be indispensably kept in sight, (and the imagination must be elevated accordingly) that as the motives and pursuits of great characters are beyond the common way of thinking and of acting, so their manner of effecting their purposes

in those high scenes must not be squared or judged by the common rules of ordinary conduct.*

As the history of man is filled up by occurrences and pursuits, and as these have invariable relation to his condition and character, it may be useful to remark upon the different conditions, as they have relation to appropriate and characteristic pursuits. In this view, with regard to PERSONS represented, biography may dispose them into three separate classes.—

1. Those whose common objects and whose ordinary conduct are supplied and formed by the general periods and incidents of life.

2. Those who, in addition to the above, take their objects and actions from the principles and exercise of a certain art or vocation.

3. And those personages, who, beside the former, are beholden to great or uncommon objects for their conduct; or who, from extraordinary personal powers, direct their pursuits to great and uncommon objects.

* "And I endeavoured to defend David and Solomon's character against the attacks of my father. These histories teach me, in general, how difficult it is to pronounce a just judgment on individual actions, particularly on actions of great men, whose views encompass the whole."—*Secret Journal of a Self-Observer, by Lavater: Vol. II.*

Having classified the agents according to their several conditions, it will not be foreign to our purpose to take some notice of the nature and structure of the PURSUITS : and they may be examined in relation with the three departments specified ; or they may be considered under a more general aspect. In this investigation, the attentive student will find rich biographic matter, which, in a superficial view, does not seem to be promised by the apparent mechanism of the process. In following a pursuit to a fixed object, through a train of orderly and determinate action, the mind is not only gratefully exercised, but is also acquiring the most important of all practical habits, that of tracing the means of attaining an object through all the secret links of apprehension, estimation, preparation, commencement, progression, acquisition, and consequence.—“ Propterea quod ostendat (scilicet historia artium) res in motu, et magis recta ducat ad praxin.”*

What Godwin, in his “Political Justice,” has invested in the practical character of a Necessarian, may fairly be applied to the investigator of the moral and active direction of means to a precise and attainable END. “His office would con-

* Bacon. Aphorismi de conficienda historia prima. Aphorism V.

sist of two parts—the exhibition of motives to the pursuit of a certain end ; and the delineation of the easiest way of attaining that end.”

In this place, it seems proper to take up the topic of PURSUITS on a more general scale, as indicated in a former part of this Essay.* The synoptical form has been chosen, as most conducive to the purpose. A table of aphorisms, drawn by induction from the comparison of various instances, will perhaps give exercise to the student's synthetical powers, by furnishing an opportunity of applying axioms to the solution of particular cases.—*Vias non solum monstrare, sed inire quoque.*†

TABLE.

ATTAINING AN OBJECT, GENERALLY.

1. In life, as in most things else, we never see but the *middle* of the course. The beginning and the end are often hidden from the agent himself—in general from every body else.

2. All we can observe is a process—an *action*.

* Part Second: p. 101.

† Bacon : in *Distributione Operis*.

3. All voluntary action is determined to a certain *end*.

4. Where the end is remote,—a number of smaller intermediate actions, bounded by their particular ends, will occur in the course of the main process.

5. These partial objects and directions are often mistaken for the progressions and purposes of the main design :—and now and then the contrary.

6. Here then we have gained one point of our investigation, viz.—*one general end*.

7. We have also found, that between the general end and the first rise of the process, there will occur a number of intermediate, subordinate objects, and their particular means of attainment.

8. To action there is a beginning as well as an end.

9. The power that sets the instruments first in motion is the beginning.

10. Before the active powers are set into

motion, there is an interior process of the mental organs, in which the progression is reversed.

11. In this operation the end becomes the first mover, and the mind the passive receiver.

12. The end shewing itself as something good, beautiful, great, new, or useful, impresses the soul with a PASSION TO OBTAIN IT.

13. Here, then, the moral end becomes the physical beginning : and,

14. The process, result, and form, will stand thus—PASSION, MEANS, END.

These portions of the grand process must be examined more particularly. The first consideration is that of the end or object. An object, in order to its attainment, is considered in these several predicaments.—1. Its degree of native or innate worth ;—2. its degree of worth with respect to the agent ;—3. the probability of attainment,

1. The intrinsic value of an object, which is essential to it. Take as an instance, a woman of merit, beauty and virtue.

2. That portion of value or utility in an object, which unites, or may unite, with the circumstances, condition, and character of the agent. For, as in the above case, a woman may have merit and beauty, yet may be married, contracted, or there may be disparity of years and other incongruities. Now, though there might be a desire, and, in some instances, even a hope of obtaining her, yet will a certain degree of abatement of her merit occur from the paramount consideration how far her worth attaches to the agent.

3. The likelihood of possession will be appreciated—by a summary prospect of the best means of pursuing—by the consciousness of the agent's own power and weakness—by the obstacles that are likely to occur—and, by the nature and degree of the assistance that may be expected.

These three, concurring, create the passion for attainment. The first inspires admiration ; the second desire ; and the third resolution :—all which, combined in an adequate degree, produce the energy requisite to the pursuit.

In considering the probability of attainment, the object and the agent fall into another predi-

cament of relation. If the greatness of probability lie rather in the nature of the object than of the agent, the impression will have more of speculation than of passion in it; the pursuit will be less animate, and be urged rather by the meditations of the judgment, than by the energies of the heart: similar to the expectations derived from inheritance, reversion, &c.

But if the hopes of success spring from the necessity of self-dependence, or from a consciousness of native powers—if, in the agent's own breast, he feel a passion vehement enough to enforce his designs, and a resolution sufficiently firm to invigorate his pursuits—then, all the process is steady, great, and ardent: the sensibility of the heart attracts the faculties of the understanding; and in the felicity of their union a man feels capable of executing those bold achievements that arrest the attention and admiration of less-confident observers. Hope seems to partake more of the nature of the first, and desire of the latter: that is, desire springs from the warmth of our own wishes, and hope has more relation to the attainable nature of the object. Hope, of the two, seems to operate more generically; for we always desire what we hope, but hope is often absent where there is desire.

Proximity and remoteness, contraction and diffusion, have powerful influence in modifying these operations. There is the greatest degree of vivacity in our commerce with those things (circumstances, pursuits, &c.) that seem immediately near us. While confined to this degree of proximity, the pursuits are narrow and directed to the near object, which is generally, indeed, almost necessarily, selfish: that is, it has more relation to the agent than to the end.

When the views are entirely bounded by these close limits, though the pursuits may be contracted and selfish, they will, in general, acquire a degree of intensity, (as being directed to a determinate object almost within reach) which is not often attached to the diffuse prosecution of more vague or distant schemes.

Frequently the nature and efficiency of these close pursuits are such as to become the seeds of distant and important consequences; to which, according to the modification of the passion, the agent pays less regard than their value seems to merit; he being engrossed more by the near principle (as is seen in avarice, &c.) than by its remote effects, however material or splendid.

There are some other circumstances attending this general view of the nature and process of attaining an object, with which we may conclude. The great division of ENDS (and, of course, pursuits) may be set down as *solitary* and *mixed*. Some, very few, pursue unmingled, solitary ends, without being affected by any current of society. But most men, while they are pursuing their own particular ends, are, at the same time, carried on by that stream of society to which they have relation by blood, neighbourhood, religion, party, country, &c. Some of these mixed characters place their solitary end in the course of the general current ; or at least in such a position that the pursuits are helped by it:—and a few, elevated in sentiment, have no other end but the general one of some community.

The wider the community is, which has relation to the end, the more generous but, in most cases, the less intense will be the pursuit. The nearer the social pursuit is brought to the solitary, the greater the degree of intenseness but the less of elevation.

To give extended pursuits the vivacity of the solitary, they are broken into divisions—parties, confederations, sects, societies. By this favourable mode of partition, they who, bearing offices

in these communities, centre extensive influence or command in their own persons, have all the advantages of social and solitary ardour.

Man absolutely solitary is a savage—in society a hero. Parties and offices give the true medium for important action. Those in the mixed class, as noticed above, joining their individual pursuits with those of a public currency, will unite that vigour and comprehension by which, while they take in great views, they are stimulated to advance with all the energy of selfishness.

As inquiries of this kind are not only to be considered in process, and in variety, but also as subject to be circumscribed within convenient limits—it may be here proper to close our aphoristical studies on the doctrine of motive, means, and end, as applying to pursuits considered in the abstract; and just to add, that what has been offered on this head is part of the issue of an inquiry into certain instances of ambition and avarice, collected from an inductive comparison of relative characters.

Political sentiments, professional attainments and practice, prevailing passions, and social connections, have met due attention from biographers. Love and marriage, considering their importance

in the great business of life, have not, in all cases, been sufficiently regarded. The other points applying to this period of the journey through life are too essential to have passed unnoticed, and cannot be reckoned as deficient.

SECT. IX. AGE.

On this declining stage of our existence there is not much to be advanced, as subject to biographical remark. There have been professed treatises on the subject; the celebrated one of Cicero, perhaps, comprising most of the topics that apply to its moral and intellectual bearings. The personal circumstances at this advanced period will call for due attention; such as the external comforts, bodily condition, and kindly intercourse of family, friendship, and other correspondence.

Doctor Paley, with conviction on his side, observes, that "to novelty, to acuteness of sensation, to hope, to ardour of pursuit, succeeds, what is, in no inconsiderable degree, an equivalent for them all, PERCEPTION OF EASE. The young are not happy but when enjoying pleasure; the old are happy when free from pain." Rousseau well

describes this period to be "the interval of repose and enjoyment between the hurry and the end of life."

The mental faculties must also be attended to. The moral and intellectual experience gained in an extended commerce with mankind, and (where the case presents) with literature and science, frequently confer upon dignified old age the happy power of communicating what has been so long and so beneficially accumulated. Examples in abundance are every where before us of this happy union of advanced age with unimpaired intellect : and by the side of the confident question, put by Tully into the mouth of Cato, we can securely place a triumphant one, regarding the illustrious sages of our modern times.—

"Num philosophorum principes, Pythagoram, Democritum, num Platonem, num Xenocratem, num postea Zenonem, Cleanthem, aut eum, quem vos etiam Romæ vidistis, Diogenem Stoicum, coegit in suis studiis obmutescere senectus ? An non in omnibus iis studiorum agitatio vitæ æqualis fuit ?"*

The catastrophe and concluding scene of all should be faithfully represented—as giving the

* Cicero : Cap. VII. de Senectute.

perfect finish to the character ; sometimes, as attended with peculiar circumstances worth preserving ; and, always, contemplated in its moral aspects, as an awful, edifying example, exhibiting all the shades of expiring life, " from the agonies with which the furious soul of Cataline burst forth to the seeming gentle slumbers of a Seneca."

Biography has some interesting pictures of this, the final act of our existence : though it must be acknowledged that the practice is not so frequent or so successful as we could wish. Tacitus is accounted peculiarly fortunate in his manner of depicting the impressive circumstances attending that dreadful change. The expiring moments of Germanicus, and the death of Otho, are drawn with a masterly and feeling hand. " The relations which he gives of the deaths of several eminent personages, are as affecting as the deepest tragedies. He paints with a glowing pencil, and possesses beyond all writers the talent of painting, not to the imagination merely, but to the heart."* We cannot conclude without pointing to a beautiful picture of this awful kind—taken in the last moments of Samuel Rose, and feelingly delineated by Mr. Hayley, in a short

* Blair : Lectures.

memoir, at the conclusion of Vol. III. of his Life of Cowper.

Nor, among others, should the plain but faithful exhibitions of Isaac Walton be forgotten. His death-bed scenes are executed in a most interesting stile. His own piety, mixing with the religious circumstances attending that awful hour, offers to our susceptibility a representation, at once, solemn and consoling, sympathetic and exemplary.

Other circumstances attending this inevitable separation of mind from matter, have been noted in the index. A winding up, or peroration, may conclude the whole with advantage, especially where the nature or importance of the subject might seem to justify such an addition. In the closing the narration of man's life, nothing can go beyond the beautiful apostrophe of Tacitus, with which he finishes the solemn and energetic history he has given of his father-in-law, Agricola. It is a model which has not been excelled, and is indeed fitted to close the

———last scene of all
That ends this strange eventful history.*

* Shakespear.

CHAP. II.

Character.

ALTHOUGH the whole narrative of a man's life should be composed with a view to exhibit and substantiate the precise character—and though the entire scope of this attempt has been to increase the means and promote the studies suitable to such an explication—it may still be expedient to devote a distinct portion of our Essay, exclusively, to this subject. It may be profitable to examine what has already been offered on the topic, and what has personally occurred in attentive contemplations of the living character: that, by bringing all the observations into one collective view, we may be enabled to advance and improve the studies of what may be considered the very spirit and essence of biographical composition.

In remarking upon the delineation of character as presented by biographers, or as adapted to the examination and improvement of the observer, it is not intended to confine the observations either to the preliminary miniature at the commencement, or the full-finished portrait at the end of the work. The position we would wish to establish is, that the character should not for a mo-

ment be lost to the artist's or the student's view. In the great pictures of history, or in the conversation-pieces of more familiar life, the characteristic likeness and originality of expression must ever be kept conspicuous and predominant. The skilfulness of the general design may excite admiration, and the curious adaptation of the parts may surprise by its accuracy; the reasoning may convince, and the reflections may instruct; but it is the *expression of character*, only, that can unite us to the subject, that can interest our sympathy and fix our application.

In biographical productions, the character is not dwelt upon with the attention and warmth its importance demands. The character is all in all. Circumstances and occurrences may assist, modify, and, sometimes, even command. But it is the MAN who encounters and makes use of them; and, in such conflicts, the effects produced are exactly according to the nature and efficiency of the character. This is a point so true and so essential, that we cannot take it up in too high a point of view, or dwell too long upon its influence and importance. The *character* of Luther * created the reformation. Had it been formed of

* Erasmus said of him with tolerable accuracy, that God bestowed upon mankind so violent a physician, in consequence of the magnitude of their diseases.

the trembling nerve of Erasmus, or the meek disposition of Melancthon, the papal dominion would, at that period, if not still, have been triumphant in those districts and kingdoms, which, by the influence of the violent* as well as courageous nature of the man, were impelled to withdraw from the pale of that long-established authority.

There is a general character, common to all men, which is stamped by nature; and, in the circumstances, common to all, is regulated by the same principles. The diversity, arising from temperament, condition, situation, or accident, forms the individual distinction, which, though it may modify, cannot destroy the instinctive propensities or common characteristics which constitute the species.

There is extant much elaborate disquisition on the different faculties, habits, manners, humours, passions, which, in their various degrees and combinations, give formal existence to the human character. But these intellectual stores, though rich in learned investigation and practical influence, are diffused and detached; and, excepting

* And Melancthon remarked that he was possessed by passions as violent as the outrages of Hercules, of Philoctetes and Marius,

in a few instances, not adjusted or directed to that precise point of view, that would seem to illustrate this province of biography.

In the exhibition of character there have been different methods adopted by theorists, as well as by practical narrators. Some of these it may be proper to notice. Among the number of those who have distinguished themselves in this branch of ethical science, it would be unpardonable to omit the names of two eminent delineators of character; and who have shewn high, though distinct excellence, by conceiving their subjects in two different points of view. The one, considering the causes or internal springs of action, and, in general principles and qualities of the mind, beholding and depicting the individual character; the other, regarding the external behaviour and conduct, the habits and peculiarities of a man,—determining from them, the peculiar, the primordial passion by which they are caused and actuated.

The philosopher of the latter class, whom we have to regard on this occasion, is no other than Theophrastus, the disciple and successor of Aristotle; and the other the no less celebrated La Bruyere, the French Academician.

Theophrastus sets out with the title of some general foible or folly at the head of his dissertation ; but he instantly places before your eyes the particular actions and manners of a living model. Sometimes this mode of drawing to the life is so closely followed in all its actual workings and appearances, that he frequently loses sight of the general characteristic, to indulge in a description of such peculiarities as seem to belong to the mixed transactions of a known individual. His are the minute but accurate pictures of the Flemish school. The external manners, the actions, words, semblances, the very gesture and deportment, are all depicted with a faithful pencil : and from his vivid delineation of particular circumstances and conduct, he leaves to the perusers of the work the sagacious task of deducing the latent sources, the general principles, by which they were formed and actuated.

Bruyere, on the contrary, discloses the thoughts, sentiments, and prevailing inclinations of his personages ; the internal feelings and general qualities of the mind. From them he passes to the particular modes of action and conduct, as derived from those general sources. Though he too is said to have drawn from the life, he sets out with general principles ; he lays open those great sources, those secret springs of action, which

actuate and give form to the individual character. Without once losing sight of their operation, he describes their effects in particular circumstances of conduct and behaviour, as appropriately as the minute drawings of external manners, delineated by the exact pen of Theophrastus. But, in general, his are studies of the internal movements and principles of the human mind, which in their degrees of force and combination produce all those obvious circumstances of practice and conduct, by which the genuine character is indicated.

Each of these different manners of treating the human character is attended by some advantages which are also counterpoised by some unfavourable circumstances. The most desirable mode would be found in the uniting of them both. To construct a theory, and then bend every fact and phenomenon, in order to force them to agree with the assumed principles of the hypothesis, is reversing the orderly course of our intellectual nature. And to dwell upon facts and descriptions only, without comparing and classifying them, without investigating the principles that give them form and the laws by which they are governed, is to remain satisfied with the effects of mere perception, without ever advancing to the power of general conclusions.

As to the beginning with generalities, it must be remembered, that reasoning *a priori* is not for man. Though axioms or principles, raised by legitimate induction, may be applied to analogous cases, the practice of beginning with particulars, of considering and comparing them, and with the results of such investigation ascending to generalities, is so consonant to the natural direction of human curiosity, and to the approved method of modern researches, that it can never be safely abandoned.

It seems apparent, then, that the philosophy of character must be founded on actual observations, —directed precisely to facts—those especially of personal condition, manners, tendencies, and sentiments; to the view of the moral and intellectual faculties; and to the course of voluntary action, in its progressive series of motive, means, attainment, and consequence. And the philosophy of man—still paying due regard to its pneumatological associations—is formed from a comprehensive view, arrangement, and generalization of the principles elicited from a number of these studies on the individual character.

Before the work of tracing divisions and varieties which seem naturally to occur upon inspecting the chart of human character, it may be again

permitted to remark with some emphasis, that the great and indispensable preliminary study is "to form notions of human nature as general as possible, dropping all local and individual character."* The investigation must be pursued until it reach those comprehensive principles which embrace the whole species in all its relations, and which seldom vary even amidst the revolutions of time or circumstances.

After the several studies which have been so earnestly, though respectfully, offered to the notice of the critical observer throughout the course of this Essay, there is little room left, nor will it appear necessary, to dilate farther upon the semblable, specific features, which form the standard character. The next division, proceeding from generality to the gradual subdivision of parts, will be, to contemplate, in a distinct aspect, that modification of the general character, which is produced and communicated by the customs, manners, institutions, religion, and public occurrences of that country to which the subjects under examination respectively belong.

There is so just a line drawn between the formation of a national character and that of an indivi-

* Edinburgh Review—on Knight's Principles of Taste.

dual one, in a posthumous work by Helvetius, which, though we are far from coinciding with the general philosophy of that celebrated author, applies so directly to our present purpose as, in some measure, to claim an insertion.

“There are, in every country, a certain number of objects, that education offers equally to all ; and it is the uniform impression of those objects that produces in the inhabitants that resemblance of ideas and sentiments, to which we give the name of the *spirit and character of a nation*. There is, beside, a certain number of different objects that chance and education present to each individual ; and it is the different impressions of these objects, which produce in the same individuals that diversity of ideas and sentiments, to which we give the name of *particular spirit and character*.”

The physical effects of climate, though not altogether without influence, are not to be regarded too highly in this estimate of national character. The natural results, proceeding from the temperature of the region or the local configuration of the country, can have substantial impression only on the complexional tendencies. Such circumstances may, in their force or variety, induce a peculiar disposition, which perhaps is

only definable in its state of activity or collapse: such as vivacity or thoughtlessness, briskness or indolence, susceptibility or dulness, &c. These, no doubt, are efficient on what may be called the constitutional character; but the institutions of government, the nature and spirit of the laws, the system of police, the mode of dispensing the ordinances of justice, the religious establishment in form, discipline, and toleration, together with the nature and consequences of public events—these are the sources, from which, as far as they regard what is exclusively called national, the temper and disposition of a people are essentially and originally derived.

To enter with more precision into the study of national character, it will be necessary to examine with attention the notions, prejudices, fashions, humours, peculiar pursuits, and general condition of a people, with the adopted partiality and practical discrimination of a native. Under the influence of this assumed relation, many minute touches of character, derived from causes, intelligible only through a medium of national apprehension, and not evident to common observers, may be developed and decided on.

When the peculiar prominencies have been rendered familiar by close and frequent inspec-

tion, it will then be proper to take such a distance as will admit a complete view of the subject—such a comprehensive aspect as may allow us to ascertain the dependence and congruity of the parts, by again taking the usual station, where they are only regarded as a whole. An ingenious artifice has sometimes been adopted for this purpose, which has been efficient both for the study and exhibition of the spirit and manners of a nation. The character of a philosophic observer, belonging to a country, different in its nature and circumstances from the one in contemplation, has been assumed. Under the form of a Turkish spy, a Jew—or by the vehicle of Letters written by a Persian or Chinese, the inquisitor takes the opportunity of laying open and appreciating all the characteristic peculiarities of a nation ; and this carried into discriminate effect, by a minute and scrupulous comparison of one set of manners and prejudices with the opinions and usages of another system, equally founded on arbitrary notions of prescriptive forms and local circumstances.

Other corporate relations of character are to be met with, and have been considered in their general influence, previous to the inspection of the individual distinctions. The characteristics contracted by the pursuit and practice of a pro-

fession have been often discussed ; but will still attract attention in another division of our plan. Religion, too, as affecting the character, has not passed unnoticed : however, a few observations, on what we deem essential to the display of biographic truth, may be admitted.

In representing the character of individuals, as well as nations, with regard to the influence of religion, the matter has not been considered fairly. Writers have treated the subject according to the improvements and principles of their own times and feelings. In this way of proceeding, whatever authors may offer, with seeming advantage as to present discussion of comparative morality or religious preference, they lose in biographical representation. They expatiate with warmth and learning as to the moral and religious inferiority of past times, applicable only to a discussion absolutely dedicated to such a purpose—but pass over slightly, or omit altogether, or what is worse than either, confound in their own partial views, that biographical information, which can only be attained by contemplating the identical character, as it was necessarily formed and actuated, according to the absolute condition of the person and the prevailing spirit of the existing times. In attempting to delineate the character of an individual influenced by the high and commanding

principles of his own religious persuasion, it is not biographically just to measure opinions and proceedings on the improved scale of our own convictions. To investigate the qualities and purposes of men, we must, for the moment, suppress our own notions of expediency and rectitude, and endeavour to follow their footsteps through the unavoidable prejudices of education, and the established maxims of their condition and times. If this course be unfairly abandoned, our representation will be nothing more than a comparative estimate between their prepossessions and ours ; and, in this confined way of examination, we lose the clew to their real purposes and conduct, which should be the unqualified object of the biographer's inquiry.

The characters of men are, in general, formed by the gradual operation of occurrences and circumstances : that is, by events and situations. The natural constitution may go far in originally disposing the mind to receive or reject, with eagerness or with laxity, certain impressions ; but in the intercourse itself with immediate objects, we must seek for that actual power by which the character is formed, developed, and expanded. The intensity of the effect is produced by the nature of the external circumstances, and the degree of susceptibility with

which they are entertained. In this operation the influence is reciprocal ; the circumstances in which a man is placed, determining the direction and force of his susceptibility, and the latter by repeated associations, giving assignable value to the circumstances. The susceptibility of the perceptive and mental faculties, estimated in its different degrees and qualities, is both the source and essence of character. The whole train of imitation, habits, sentiments, pursuits and acquirements, is brought into energy and action by the nature and force only of individual disposition

OR SUSCEPTIBILITY.

The moral and active character may undergo various changes from the diversity of objects and events with which the life is chequered ; but the natural disposition, whether originally implanted or acquired, is constant in its influence. New objects and new associations may produce fresh and various modes of conduct and determination, but the constitutional character is never lost ; it may be modified, but never destroyed.

It must be noted in this place, that the degree of energy to be exerted is not always proportionable to the force of the impression received. Though, in some ardent minds, the re-action of the will has been commensurate with the sensi-

bilities of the heart ; yet we often see quickness of susceptibility producing only desultory effort, and rapidity of conception soon satisfied in the exercise of slight essays, and in the gratification of subordinate attainment. Whereas we frequently find a disportion not suddenly excited, but receiving calmly, and in regular succession, the impressions suited to its unruffled nature, go steadily and dispassionately on to its purpose ; and, by making sure use of its accurate materials, produce effects beyond the reach of mutable vivacity or even irregular enthusiasm.

Whatever, constitutionally, or by habit, adds to firmness of resolution, contributes to form that fortunate class of men who are distinguished as being in possession of what is termed **STRENGTH OF CHARACTER** ; and every circumstance tending to promote or acquire that happy endowment should be examined by the biographer with scrupulous attention.

The whole range of human characters might, as to their importance and efficiency, be very fairly separated into two great divisions ;—those, who, courageous, and collected in themselves, carry on their purposes with firmness and resolution ; and those others, by far the greater portion, who, constitutionally timorous, feeble, or

pliant, dare not embark in any enterprize of hazard or exertion, or, who if stimulated by accident or necessity to some temporary adventure, faint under the fatigue of needful perseverance, and are intimidated by the very appearance of obstruction or danger.

There is also another division of character, which, though it has not passed without notice, may bear to be touched on with some propriety. This division proceeds from the nature of the intellectual and moral qualities, as considered apart ; and from a contemplation of the dissimilar appearances of character, arising from their separate influence. And it seems the more fitting to offer a few observations on the subject, according to this distinction, as the two classes of qualities have been often confounded ; and, sometimes, the eminent professor of the one, (by the notion of some fanciful analogy of the several powers) has been supposed, from a necessary association, to be in absolute fruition of the gifts and faculties of the other.

But though we have some illustrious instances of this happy union, we have too many cases of an opposite determination to receive an hypothetical analogy for a necessary co-existing establishment. The intellectual endowments of Cicero

were of that extended and exalted sort, as few among the sons of men have been favoured with ; yet, uninfluenced by the spirit of these transcendent powers, his moral course was marked by weakness, ambition, inconstancy, and an insatiable, and even criminal, lust of praise. And in that glory and, in some measure, that shame of our country and our species, the immortal Bacon, we have a flagrant example of the frequent disunion of these classes of mental disposition, too generally known to need the mortifying repetition here ; and too obvious in its consequences, not to make manifest an evident distinction, both in the nature and in the result of the moral and intellectual system.

In pursuing this study, there is an advantage, which, though not often, does sometimes occur ; and that is when, what is called, an original (meaning a marked and distinct character) is the subject of observation. This is the case when the disposition and conduct appear consistent with each other in all their relations and dependencies ; when a complete congruity is observed in all their leading manners, sentiments, and pursuits ; when every assemblage of particulars seems appropriately collected, and all the separate parts have relation to an impressed and substantial distinction of the character as a whole, shewing, at one

view the conformation of the features, and displaying the figure at full length—with the national drapery, serving, by the flowing light and shade of its folds, rather to display than encumber the original proportion of the form.

To search for this originality of character amidst the collision of modern intercourse and refinement, would be a fruitless task. Politeness, fashion, decorum—preside over the institutions of these latter times. A splendid uniform covers every size and figure, however originally unlike each other. Occasions, therefore, but seldom occur, when we are enabled, by tearing aside the arbitrary garb of prevailing forms, to have an opportunity of beholding the unsophisticated character, thus generally covered from distinctive observation.

The great intercourse which has taken place among the nations of modern times, rendered less difficult by the improved accommodations of travel, and the interesting effects produced by commerce, have so amalgamated the once-peculiar ores of customs, manners, and pursuits, that investigations of the prominences and distinguishing traits of character do not now possess the opportunity and means, which the decisive lineaments of former periods so amply furnished.

This, among other circumstances, should lead us, in no light degree, to reap the advantages which may be derived from incessant study of the marked and original features of character, which are exhibited as models in the collections of the ancients.

Though in the study of man, with a purpose to gain the knowledge of the general principles by which he is actuated as a species, the local forms may be melted into one comprehensive survey; yet a particular view of the human character, as it is contemplated, subsisting in all its bold protuberances among the ancients, will contribute very much to lead us to a just insight into the principles of those distinct manners and circumstances in which the unadulterated operations of nature, and the most obvious laws of human action are disclosed. In these studies we perceive the manners to be unobstructed and simple, and the passions direct and forcible. Neither the fallacious ornaments of affectation, nor the all-confounding uniforms of fashion, do, in any great measure, veil from our discernment the actual movements and natural tendency of the genuine character.

In these strong features, and in this energy of mind, (which, whether morally good or vicious,

are exact, inseparable attributes of the character*) we must seek for those original proportions, in a great degree concealed by the changeable tissue of modern manners. What may seem to be lost, as to present use, by the distance of the period, will be gained by the strength and vigour of the collected principles; and these will always apply to the leading facts and effective powers which mark and regulate the general character, and point to those great movements by which the system is actuated and governed.

The varieties and apparent incongruities which are often observed in the actions and sentiments of the same person, present to the biographer an interesting and extensive department of his studies.

Duplicity of conduct, variety of motives, and alteration of circumstances, necessarily produce different appearances in the same character; so that, when generally exhibited, it will to a superficial or incompetent observer appear wholly inconsistent.

* "It is in the works of art as in the characters of men. The faults or defects of some men seem to become them, when they appear to be the natural growth, and of a piece with the rest of their character. A faithful picture of a mind, though it be not of the most elevated kind, though it be irregular, wild, and incorrect, yet if it be marked with that spirit and firmness which characterise the works of genius, will claim attention, and be more striking than a combination of excellencies that do not seem to hang well together." *Sir J. Reynolds' Academic Discourses.*

These changes will be estimated by the succession, force, or duration of the inciting circumstances, and the versality or firmness of the subject; and will be regarded as important, according to the degree and quality of the alteration, its permanence, or its fluctuation. When the circumstances following a change become fixed, the revolution in the character is established; when they fluctuate or are removed, the character returns to its usual tenour. Why does the robber, when transported from England to America, frequently become honest? Because he becomes a man of property, and has land to cultivate;—in short, because his situation is changed. An officer in active warfare can behold the scenes of blood and slaughter with a mind unmoved:—take but the war-attending circumstances away,—place him again in London or in Paris, his heart resumes its tenderness, the usual feelings of humanity return.*

When any powerful change is about to be recorded or studied, a pause should be made, and an ample review of the character, as it stands at that precise period, should be taken. This practice will help to shew, in a distinct light, the power of external circumstances in producing

* Partly from Helvetius.

revolutions in an apparently fixed character; and by this review, also, the way will be cleared, for observing the kinds of dispositions that are, by their constitution, the easiest, or most difficult, to be influenced by the nature and succession of particular objects. For it must be remembered that the same objects or excitements, presented or occurring to different individuals, will not, in degree or quality, produce the same effects. Some dispositions will require a greater quantity of this exciting power before they can be brought into that state or condition, which, in others, is effected by a smaller proportion. In some men the original preponderancy of character is so firmly established, that, like the Cato of Utica, they present an inflexible vigour of resistance to every change of circumstance or condition. And, in not a few cases, we behold the very same state of circumstances completely reversing the characters of men, and producing, in different persons, even violent effects of the most opposite tendency.* Thus the possession of supreme authority exhibited an important change in the

* Tacitus has many masterly sketches of this disappointment of expectations, founded on conduct in situations that occurred before. This is one amongst many.—“Vitellius and Vespasian had been pro-consuls in Africa: the former governed with moderation, and was remembered with gratitude; the latter incurred the hatred of the people. From past transactions, the province and the allies in the neighbourhood formed the idea of what they had to expect under the reign of either of them; but the event convinced them of their error.”

characters of the emperors Augustus and Constantine; but the effects of that change were in an exact contrary direction. From selfishness, cruelty, dissimulation, and a course of most unprincipled manners, Augustus, when securely seated in dominion, rose to an exalted pitch of liberality, mildness, candour, and munificence; while, actuated by a like change of circumstances, the latter emperor, from a character ennobled by openness, temperance, activity, and heroic vigour, degenerated into a course of conduct and propensities, stained by prejudice, dissoluteness, cruelty, and effeminate ostentation.

These appearances, with which biography abounds, may, in general, seem to indicate a total revolution in the inclinations and purposes of the character. But here it will become us to pause. In many instances the constitutional dispositions have been only suppressed by circumstances and situations, merely political. When this is the case, and when these controlling circumstances are removed or surmounted, the original propensities will return—and, frequently, with a degree of increased activity, equal to the force and duration of the constraint.

The varied character of Tiberius will afford us another opportunity of studying the seemingly-

disjointed materials of these anomalies, as well as help to point out the nature and supposed causes of the contrariety. When a suspicion can arise, that the appearances may be the reverse of the real purposes and sentiments, it might be found of advantage to trace the whole character back to its sources, step by step, in a retrograde investigation; assisted by the lights of this experiment, again to follow the march and formation of the character in direct progression to its established, undisguised position;—and, from the observations and principles gained by such a process, essay to solve the problematical appearance of one period, by a proportional estimate with the actual and acknowledged conduct of another.

An interesting example of this study runs through all the reflections of Tacitus upon the character of Tiberius. On every occasion he takes the veil from before the dissembler's seemings, and penetrates into the motives of his mysterious conduct. The conclusion of the sixth book of the "Annals" is a summary of character perfectly illustrative of this mode of inquiry and representation. "His manners, like his fortune, had their revolutions, and their distinctive periods; amiable while in a private station; and when in the highest employments, under Augustus, esteemed and honoured. During the lives of Drusus and

Germanicus, he played an artificial character, concealing his vices, and assuming the exterior of virtue. After their decease, and while his mother lived, good and evil were equally blended in his conduct. Detested for his cruelty, he had the art, while he loved or feared Sejanus, to throw a veil over his most depraved and vicious appetites. All restraint being at length removed, he broke out without fear or shame, and, during the remainder of his life, hurried away by his own unbridled passions, made his reign one scene of lust, and cruelty, and horror.*

The general demeanour, the original characteristic *manner* of pursuing an object, will, in most cases, continue to mark the conduct; though different periods or situations may have changed the circumstances and the object. Cromwell, Rienzi, and others of that class, will supply instances sufficiently numerous and appropriate to the student's notice. Yet there are

* Gordon, in his Discourses upon Tacitus, gives an able sketch of these changes in the character of Tiberius. The drawing is so accurate, as to merit our notice.—“Tis from awe of his mother, from fear of Germanicus, from jealousy of the grandees, and with design to amuse and humour or to deceive them all, that he rules and acts with such temper and moderation, against the bent and pride of his nature always imperious and tyrannical. But when he had established himself, when Germanicus was dead; when his mother was gone; when he had enriched some of the grandees and had terrified all; and especially when he was far from the eyes of Rome;—is it not most true that he then gave a loose to all the excesses of violence and cruelty?”

not wanting examples of those, in whose manners and conduct the accession of new objects and circumstances, has produced so radical a change as to leave manifest but little of the original distinction of character.

Change of place, change of condition, and change of society, will all produce correspondent alteration in the disposition and purposes; and as Dr. Johnson, in opposition to Mr. Pope's hypothesis of a "ruling passion," aptly remarks, that he who is at one time a lover of pleasure, is at another, a lover of money. It is thus evident that men change their very nature with their situation. With what concern do we behold the pliant disposition of even powerful minds bending to the force of incidental necessity, and receiving impressions from the degradation, perhaps never to be wholly effaced? Among other instances, we may contemplate the mean and abject prostration of the once great Belisarius before his infamous wife, when, by her very intrigues, he was disgraced and his life threatened, after his noble career of glory and conquest; and, though employed again, and in some measure restored to the favours of Justinian, never displaying his pristine magnanimity, after that reversion in his fortune and disposition.

It will appear then, from what we have been able to collect, by a minute inspection of the disposition and conduct of various descriptions of persons in various points of situation and circumstances, and from a comprehensive view of the several parts as they have relation to the common principles of all, that the summing or winding up of a man's general character, as a consistent whole, is a task of most difficult, if not impossible, execution. The constitutional faculties, the mental powers and endowments, together with the moral tendencies and leading principles of action, may be traced, in regular cases, through all the stages of access, increment, and completion. The character may be viewed under various aspects, and at different periods. But the difficulty remains in drawing up the conclusive summary—the uniting or compounding all the various parts, distinctions, relations, associations, exceptions, and seeming incongruities, into one lively and compact form; the being able to avoid, on the one hand, that prolix enumeration of particulars, that tires by its minuteness or disgusts by its familiarity—and, on the other, those vague generalities, which only serve to dress up an antithesis, or cover vacuity with a garment of indefinite terms—and in possession of none of those precise designations which mark and discriminate the peculiar character. For, however the character,

towards the close of life, may settle into a general unchanging form, *that* cannot be accepted as the vivid likeness of youth or manhood, in its prime career of passion, pursuit, and achievement.

From facts and observations, thus compared, we may fairly deduce these general inferences, that the constitutional and moral circumstances of early youth have the chief influence in the formation of character; that the impressions then received do, by situation, incline or strengthen the disposition to be peculiarly excited by circumstances of a similar nature; and that, in the continuance of this process of action and reaction, a cast of permanency is given to the character, modified by the strength and duration of the impressions, the susceptibility of the disposition, and the power of resisting the influence of contravening occurrences.

But it must also be observed, that, in the succession of time, different periods of life will superinduce different and appropriate tendencies; impressions of magnitude will effectuate proportionate consequences; and a complete change of circumstances and situation will produce a commensurate alteration in the character. From these remarks it will appear, that in the estimating, or in the delineation of a character, the

predilection of system must be guarded against. Care must be taken, in attempting to bring the several bearings into one focus, and in endeavouring to explain the incidental variations by the partitions of one theory, that we do not, in the spirit of generalization, lose the form of individual resemblance ; or, on the contrary, take the prominent appearances of one shining period as a model for the general exhibition.

However the constitutional propensities may adhere to the conduct through life, it must be remembered, that man is the creature of circumstances ; and, whilst so constituted, will vary in his character according to the variations of their influence. The chieftain of the present hour resembles not the partisan of yesterday. The modest subject, the meek ecclesiastic, changes his nature with his elevation—and Becket, putting off his former character with his cassock, wields the primacy with a princely hand ; contends with kings ; and, finding a church and court too small a stage for his acquired ambition,* looks boldly forward to his niche in the pantheon of the saints.—Take a view of yonder conclave. Behold the imbecility

* "New features of mind, and a sternness of virtue, might be then produced, of which before no symptoms had been exhibited." *Barrington. History of Henry II.*

of that old, doating, drivelling cardinal. Can any thing appear more worthless, more contemptible? Hark!—The sacred college, advancing, salute him with the high-importing name of Pope!—The scene changes.—His years and his infirmities fall from him; his body becomes erect; his eye sparkles. He throws away his miserable crutch; and marching boldly up to the altar, thunders out the exulting anthem “Te Deum laudamus!” with a voice of triumph; and from the wretched Felix he rises into the illustrious character of Sixtus the fifth, the most able and dignified pontiff that ever graced the chair of St. Peter.

In concluding these remarks upon the instances of unconnected variety that are to be found at different times in the same man, it will here be sufficient to add, that these changes arise as often from the nature of the disposition as from the impression of the circumstances. Frequent changes of situation, schools, tutors, companions, &c. will often encourage a pliancy of disposition, quick to catch the influence of every impression, and as ready to give up such transient effects in favour of the next novelty presented. Of these the examples are the majority of the species. Others, also, a numerous class, exhibit important changes in their characters; but those changes are the effects of momentous circumstances, act-

ing on the susceptibility and powers of a sensitive, but vigorous mind, shewing, in every stage of the change, decisive marks of characteristic energy ; —not difficult to be followed step by step in a philosophical investigation, but scarcely to be rounded into a shape fitted for a single inspection. Such an order of personages is finely glanced at by the luminous Gibbon, in the character of Mahomet, attached to the masterly portrait he has given of that wonderful enthusiast, hero, and impostor.

"In delineating the character of Mahomet—the distance of time, and the incense of his votaries render the form faint and imperfect ;—but should the portrait of an hour be represented, the fleeting resemblance would not equally apply to the SOLITARY OF MOUNT HERA, to the PREACHER OF MECCA, and to the CONQUEROR OF ARABIA."*

Among the ancients, the practice of giving the principal features and discriminating shades of character in one comprehensive portraiture was little in use : the most valuable we are in possession of are those that have been fortunately transmitted down to us from the masterly pencils of Sallust and Tacitus. Plutarch, instead of a characteristic

* Gibbon. "Decline and Fall, &c." CHAP. L.

recapitulation of the definite powers, inclinations, manners, and pursuits, at the termination of his several narratives, has instituted or continued a method, which, if improved and pursued with more philosophical acuteness, might lay open some delightful, as well as profitable, studies of the nicer lineaments and more delicate touches which stamp distinction and identity on the character. His celebrated *Parallels*, it will be readily understood, are the substitutions alluded to. Some of these, with other more precious treasures, have been lost in the wreck of time; and the intellectual ambition of modern confidence has successfully adventured to supply the deficiencies. Dacier has furnished four—Themistocles with Camillus, Pyrrus with Marius, Alexander with Cæsar, and Phocion with Cato. The most competent judges have given the learned imitator a decided preference to his illustrious prototype. The parallels of Plutarch are adjusted statements of the distinct *merits* of certain personages, rather than a philosophical estimate of the guiding powers, the constitutional distinctions, and prevailing passions, by which the subjects might be brought into moral or intellectual comparison. His *CONTRASTS* afford more light and matter for investigation than his points of resemblance; for his dissimilitudes have generally a relation to qualities resulting from character, but his paral-

lets to mere instances of situation. He shews us frequently in these imperfect estimates, how objects are calculated, as to their value, under different points of view; and sometimes, how from a different cast of temper the same situations, and, in many instances, the same principles have led to dissimilar modes of conduct.* But, on the whole, his comparisons, are qualities measured in the balance of distinct merits—as it were, weight for weight—not a philosophic application of principles, exhibiting from a similitude in the mental powers, and a coincidence in the occasions and circumstances, a result of similar notions, pursuits, and conduct.

We have a noble instance of the excellence to which this mode of comparative examination might be raised, by the celebrated parallel of Philip of Macedon with the great Frederick of Prussia, from the accurate pen of Dr. Gillies. In the resemblance of the two characters, in the coincidence of circumstances and aptitude of application, and in the consummate skill with which the members of the comparison are made to meet, this mode of illustrating two characters by a

* “And the different line of conduct which each of them” (the biographer is speaking of Dr. Jebb and Dr. Paley) “might at times pursue, resulted rather from a difference of temperament than of principle; from the motives which respectively actuate a sanguine and a cautious mind.”—*Meudley. Life of Paley: second Ed., p. 62.*

mutually-reflecting light has not been equalled. The remarks on the profitable effects which might accrue from cultivating the practice, are so much in point that it would be injurious to our purpose to with-hold them. "Since the age of Plutarch, this comparative kind of writing has been rarely, and not very successfully cultivated ; though perhaps there is not any species of composition better adapted to enlarge comprehension, or sharpen discernment—to enrich the stores of fancy, or regulate the decisions of judgment. This particular parallel is remarkable not only for the exactness of its correspondence, but for the greatness of its extent. It is the more deserving of attention on account of the unexampled variety of circumstances of which it consists ; and this variety again, considered abstractedly, forms itself the most interesting link in the whole chain of comparison."*

Sallust has given us a small, but exquisitely-drawn pair of portraits, in a comparative delineation of the characters of Cato and Julius Cæsar, inserted in his history of the conspiracy of Catiline. There is also a curious parallel, which ought not to pass unnoticed, of those favourites, the Earl of Essex and the Duke of Buckingham,

* Gillies :—Parallel of Philip II. and Frederick II.

by Sir Harry Wotton : and this is followed by an ingenious piece, supposed to be from the masterly hand of Clarendon, entitled “ The difference and disparity between the estates and conditions of George Duke of Buckingham and Robert Earl of Essex, both of which, to use the words of Gillies, on another occasion, are calculated to ascertain their agreement by comparison, and to illustrate their differences by contrast.

There is a parallel of Cæsar and Henry IV. of France, by Antony de Baudole, added to a translation of the Commentaries in 1604. The ingenuity of the learned has been exercised in suggesting other suitable examples of this practice, which have not yet been executed : such as Pisistrates and Cromwell, Jugurtha and Richard III. Dionysius and Henry VIII. Augustus and Lewis XIV. Mithridates and Hyder Ally, Columbus and Raleigh. Thuanus and Clarendon have been already mentioned as supplying ample materials for a philosophical comparison. But the most illustrious example of ancient and modern coincidence, that could be found in the whole range of biographical celebrity, would, perhaps, be that of the characters of Cicero and Francis Bacon. Their intellectual and moral powers, the comprehensiveness of their minds, their transcendent attainments, their political functions, consti-

tutional weaknesses, and moral obliquities, offer most prominent features of association and comparison. The subject has been noticed by Dr. Aikin in a letter to his son on the character of Cicero. The points of resemblance and of difference between these two great men are distinctly and acutely touched ; and we have only to lament, that, under the skill of so diligent an observer, the examination was not taken on a larger scale. We shall conclude with the inference he draws from his contemplation of the subject, as being in unison with the tenour of our preceding observations.

“The example of Cicero is unfavourable to the opinion of the influence of speculative systems over the practice of life, and tends to confirm the notion of those who attribute moral differences chiefly to original temper, modified (but not changed) by early habits, and by subsequent situations and circumstances.”*

* “Letters from a Father to his Son,” Vol. II. p. 157.

CHAP. III.

Professional Biography.

IN our contemplation of biography—whether the complete work be laid before us, to undergo a process of analysis and study, or that the several parts are collected together, in order to composition and display—the *doctrine of Pursuits* will be the main subject to claim our attention—will be the regulating principle to be applied to the purpose of either distribution or construction. In this point of view, Pursuits are to be considered according to the succession of appropriate advances to a determinate end, or as taking, by induction, the result of a number of such cases, as a mean of direction towards the attainment of any general object.

Pursuits, directed to certain ends, adjusted by precise regulations and specified means of advancement, furnish the inquisitive mind with a class of grateful as well as profitable studies. Professional biography, scientifically executed, gives both the materials and form of these studies; and leads the general student or the kindred artist through all the combinations of skill, perseverance, established practice, and in-

ventive enterprise, to the professor's point of excellence, by the actual course the attainment of the object was accomplished.

In this disquisition, the term Profession is meant to be extended to every class of men who pursue a regular vocation, or who are, in some exclusive way, influenced by a certain designation of purpose. So that literary characters in general, as well as those that belong to what are emphatically stiled the learned professions, together with artists, warriors, navigators, and other denominations of men who engage in particular courses of employment, are to be treated in a distinct manner, according to the aim of their pursuits, the peculiar motives to exertion, and the nature of the means or instruments used in the process.

It does not come within the aim of this Essay to offer a dissertation on the peculiar characteristics marking the different professions which fall under the pen of the biographer. But it is proper to note, that of the knowledge of these professional characteristics he must be perfectly master. Every continued employment, from its principle, its end, and the manner of its execution, will necessarily impress evident and lasting opinions, habits, and modes of action: all of

which, with their different combinations and exceptions, should be sedulously investigated and accurately defined by the professional biographer. Therefore, when all the other requisites are possessed in a reasonable degree, a person belonging to, or highly conversant with, the nature and principles of the vocation in question, will be best adapted for such a composition. But, above all, when the professor comes forward as his own biographer, the most important advantages may be expected ; especially if he have candour to disclose, and skill to delineate. From such a narrator we may confidently look for a suitable and accurate exposition of his incitements, studies, and application ; of the helps he met and the impediments he struggled with ; of the means, improvement, innovations, or inventions, by which he arrived at proficiency and eminence.

We have a most excellent model of professional remark and self-disclosure in Cibber's celebrated "Apology for his Life." His strictures on the Drama and its professors, founded on good sense and practical knowledge, are calculated to be useful to writers, actors, and audience.

David Hume, from his powers of acute research and philosophical combination, was happily cal-

culated, in writing on himself, to present the world with an interesting display of the process of a literary life. But the little he has left us on that head is a jejune account of the effects and gradual success of his works, when published ; without any allusion to the regulated or accidental studies and circumstances which directed and produced them.—Not so the intelligent Gibbon. In that sketch of constitutional and mental powers which he has so concisely, but, at the same time, so accurately drawn, we behold, as his ingenious friend Lord Sheffield remarks, a complete picture of his talents, his disposition, his studies, and his attainments. But, he does more : he traces the growth and course of his literary tendencies from their first dawn to the fulness of that intellectual spirit, which inspired and directed the pen of the philosophical historian. He commences with the very tales of his childhood ; the first books of fancy which he relished, their impressions on his young mind, and how far they contributed to what he aptly calls, “the growth of his intellectual stature.” He runs through the many interruptions his literary education suffered from nervous infirmity, with their effects upon his general application ; his travels, his improvements, his designs, his early compositions,—and the circumstances which incited and directed them. Before he enters on the composition

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of his great work, he gives a practical and masterly example of professional accuracy, in his elegant enumeration of the various preparatory studies his excellent judgment deemed necessary to an undertaking of such magnitude and importance. Though this example, excellent as it is, does not afford us all we could wish, towards a complete investigation of the mental powers in a train of invention and composition—as far as it goes, it gives some practical information, and offers a fair sample of what might be done by the extension of such professional disclosures.

Boerhaave's "Comentariolus" presents a concise but regular and interesting account of his studies and improvements. It is brief; but the apparent deficiency of the self-biographer has been supplied by a congenial pen, in a judicious professional life of that eminent physician, published by Dr. Burton.

There is a copious list of modern literary, and other professional personages, who have favoured the world with accounts of their transactions, studies, and attainments; all possessing different measures of this informing spirit we speak of, according to the various motives, passions, and powers, which incited and guided them in the composition. But in none of these cases can we

catch the advantage of a perfect model ; no example of what might be effected by a minute inspection and disclosure of the whole train of incitements, dispositions, selections, changes by circumstances, artificial helps, elusion of difficulties, accession of powers, and acquired confidence of decision, which powerful minds could accurately trace in their paths to eminence ; and which, if actuated by a noble zeal for the further improvement of their respective vocations or pursuits, intelligent minds might be willing to lay open to the view and emulation of other aspirants.

In all recommendations which go directly to a particular case, care must be taken that the directions be so delicately applied, as not only to secure the projected purpose, but, at the same time, to admit of no possible misconstruction, as to the expected effects of the prescription. It has been observed, that in tracing the life of a man of science, or an artist, you investigate or exhibit a display of the science, or the art, itself ; and that, therefore, to possess the full effects of such an advantage, the composition would derive most assistance from the talents of one of the same profession. That this has been realized, we have many happy proofs. By such practised and close observers, every minute step of progress,

improvement, and invention, will be duly appreciated ; they will also be invested with a privilege to estimate the merits, elucidate the studies, and pronounce with decision on the peculiar circumstances and principles, which, by their efficacy or misapplication, conducted to excellence or betrayed to failure. But the caution to be enhanced on this occasion is, that care should be taken, lest a process too technical be adopted ; and the biography of the man be sunk in the pervestigations of the art. However the desire may or ought to be entertained of following up a favourite science through the detailed pursuits of a professional character, it must be ever kept in view, that published biography (from the very act of publishing) becomes a general property, and is expected to be such as may be examined by all classes of readers, and not reduced, by the technicality of the terms and disquisition, to the capacity and enjoyment of a distinct set of perusers. But, with all this delicacy of qualification, it must be understood, that in the extended acquirements and knowledge of the present day, there can be little to fear—from an author's following the efforts of genius through its different ramifications and progressions to the very point where it reaches the utmost extent of its powers. Indeed the contrary practice is to be deprecated as most dangerous to scientific information. For

in this case, the disadvantage would seem to be, that, in a too general description of pursuits, we might lose every connecting link, and every regulating principle, which give continuity and interest to the representation. Our distinguished countryman, Barry, takes up the subject, and considers the influence of this LATENT PROCESS with the discriminating glance of a philosopher as well as of an artist; and while he is properly remarking upon the unphilosophic and unfounded position of assigning local limits to the genius of Britons, expresses his sentiments in a manner becoming a perfect master of the case before him. The fantastical theories of Montesquieu, Winckelman, and Du Bos, are the subjects of his animadversion. "The nature and extent of their inquiries did not qualify them to enter minutely into the number of *little successional studies and researches*, upon which the growth and the species of arts depend." And again—"Nothing is more remote from the investigations of our modish philosophers than the *labyrinths of practical art*."

Johnson, from his knowledge of the whole body of our national poetry, from his discriminating powers, from his own practice in composition, and above all from his keen penetration, and perfect experience of the motives, pursuits,

and objects—especially those of literary men; was, in a peculiar manner, fitted to be the biographer of the English Poets. But, as Dr. Bussey observes,* “his biographic sketches are more confined to discriminative criticism on the works of our poets, than their manners and private life.” Now, though it is foreign to the design of these discussions to separate the character of critic and moralist from that of the biographer, it must, at the same time, be insisted on, that in writing the lives even of professional men, we are not to consider their works, in *their finished state*, as claiming our chief attention. The biographer and critic, though both writing in the same department of task, do, as distinct characters, stand upon very different grounds. With the former is only our present purpose; and in that light, it may be confidently advanced, that, in the delineation of the professional character, the principal duty of the artist is to gain, and give, if possible, a comprehensive view of the circumstances and associations that first brought inclination to the pursuit; the materials of operation, the studies, the exemplars, the connection of design, the modes of proceeding, and the adapted means of advancement and completion.

* *Original of criticism*
on literature and art
illustrating *Life of Metastasio.*

In this species of biography we are often presented, in the first place, with, what may be termed, the literary life of the character to be represented ; and the personal occurrences, and even those of a political or general nature, are afterwards added, as if subservient appendages to the main design. This is generally the practice adopted in the *eloges* of the academicians. Where literary attainments and productions are the exclusive objects of a composition, such a practice may be allowed, as the privilege of literary choice. But literature itself is influenced and directed by original tendencies and surrounding circumstances ; and when these are separated in the composition, the connective series of cause and consequence is lost, or broken. In these cases we are generally furnished with a scanty or dry detail of facts ; or perhaps a recondite display of criticism, deficient in that apposition of circumstances and consequence which gives hope to emulation, and direction to genius.

To study—to estimate the writings, or pursuits, or works of an agent, biographically considered, his own character—that is, the peculiar point of view in which he considered his subject—should be continually in the conception of the expositor or student. This is the only key that can disclose the spirit of his professional ad-

vances, and will help to elucidate the principles by which he was guided in the selection of his materials, in the form of his arrangement, the means, manner, temper, and genius, of his whole series of operation.

The professional character of the person is to be diligently sought for, and extracted from the spirit of individuality which animates an author or an artist's works. Whether Shakespear, like Butler, took immediate notes of the circumstances and observations that continually pressed upon a mind of such keen sensibility, we have unfortunately no means of determining. But of this, every man who peruses his wonderful works, in a biographic spirit, will be certain—that the great observer of Nature in all her operations, incessantly DRAMATISED every object, every action, incident, and impression, that occurred to his vigilant observation, or affected the susceptible powers of his imagination and reflection.

The several professions, by the habitudes acquired and continued, must operate in producing a certain, particular character. The principles on which they are founded, the course of action by which they are effected, and the turn of thinking, which one set of perceptions, in constant recurrence, is likely to impress, will pro-

duce an *Esprit de Corps*, a common disposition to entertain and display inclinations, modes, and trains of conduct, of a distinct and peculiar kind. These the biographer must not only have the knowledge of, but must sedulously attend to, as frequently affording assistance in developing the nature and causes of appearances, not otherwise solvable.

The nature, the method, and the progression of the studies, or means of advancement, are among the chief articles, expected to be illustrated by the professional biographer. In the preface to Dr. Aikin's Biographical Dictionary we find a compact summary of what may be required on such occasions. He and his learned coadjutor profess to answer, in their valuable work, the leading biographical questions.—“What was he? What did he?”—His moral and intellectual qualities, the principal events of his life, his relative merit in the department he occupied;—and, especially the manner in which he was first formed to his art or profession, with the gradations by which he rose to excellence.

In every part of this effort to generalize the spirit of biography, it will be readily noticed, that no advantageous occasion has been suffered to pass by, where the practice of arising from

particular instances into comprehensive principles could be enhanced or recommended. Did our limits allow the attempt, there is, perhaps, no portion of biographical representation where the experiment could be so well applied, as in this compartment of professional pursuits. It may, however, for the present be more suitable to leave such trials to the choice of the student, or the contingency of future occasion. But it cannot be improper to observe that the mode of practice we allude to, should be something in the form of the inductive table, offered as an experiment, in the beginning of the second part of this Essay. For, if the following a pursuit, founded on one of the Passions, might be allowed as a ground-work to raise a general mode of application upon, it would appear, that a more certain process might arise from the precise points and directions of a professional progression.

In such a trial, the first set of tables would consist of heads of the technical process, in the invention, improvement, or progress, of the art or science in question. From these it would next be proper to deduce a series of aphorisms in a more generalized form, and on these, by legitimate induction, found those more extended principles, which sympathetically add power to in-

tellect, and lead to what has been recorded as one of the original secrets of Freemasonry ;

The Arte of findinge new Artes,

which Mr. Locke, in his commentary on a very curious paper of this import, conjectures must be something very similar to the *Novum Organum* of Lord Bacon. *Plane Typos intelligimus et Plasmata, quæ universam mentis processum, atque inveniendi continuatam fabricam et ordinem in certis subjectis, iisque variis et insignibus, tanquam sub oculos ponant.**
 The above is a translation of the title of the work, which is a treatise on the art of finding new arts, and is a very curious and important work, and is a very good example of the style of the time.

* Bacon, in *Distributiene Opus*.

CHAP. IV.

Summary and Conclusion.

THE rage for indiscriminate biographical reading has been animadverted upon, as indicating the frivolous taste of the present times. When the mind is excited to this species of reading by a fondness of anecdote and an expectation of variety, little more seems necessary for the purpose of the author or peruser, than what might fairly be demanded from the writer and reader of a fictitious history. Indeed, with regard to solid improvement, the judicious narrator of feigned transactions, when compared with some of our biographers, appears to have greatly the advantage. The novelist, for example, may not only command the succession of events, and the association of condition, into such an orderly train of dependence as will best elucidate the view he means to exhibit of human life and conduct; but he can also create such characters, and adjust such relations between them, as may serve to fit them to situations calculated to discover the effects of circumstances on dispositions, and the consequences that are produced upon even established modes of conduct, by the occurrence of extraordinary incident or violent intrusion. But the

biographer must take his facts and transactions as they actually are. He is bound to follow them in the succession of time, connect them by the arbitrary ties of fortuitious occurrence, or the stubborn associations of condition and humour—and “pursue utility in no track but that of historical truth.”

These seeming detriments are not inherent in the composition and study of biography, considered merely as such. The disadvantages hitherto attendant on biographic delineation, are found to spring from circumstances purely accidental or extraneous. The chief obstructions have been seen to consist in the difficulty of gaining access to a sufficient store of materials for selection, and a want of skill in the artist to give them body and arrangement. To combat these obstacles, a course of study has been recommended ; such as would have the effect of suggesting helps in difficult cases, and, by persevering practice, inspire a peculiar spirit to direct the completion.

An extensive and systematic study of biography, will not only enlarge the mind to a comprehension of general principles, but will also lead to an accurate discrimination of individual character ; and, thereby clearing us from the com-

mon prejudice of directing our judgments or our practice by the measure of a common standard, generally assumed from the indiscriminate manners and pursuits of those around us. This scientific mode of examining the general principles and peculiar directions of various biography, will improve the faculties, by giving them a greater degree of penetration, accuracy, and discrimination; as also a readier power of communicating such discoveries with efficacy and clearness to the contemplation of others.

Mere application to a course of biographical reading will, undoubtedly, in time, give to a competent understanding many of the advantages that have been enumerated. But, when that mode of investigation is guided and assisted by general principles and auxiliary studies, certainly the attention will be more precisely directed, and time shortened in the progress of advancement. It is not easy to say, to what extent the capacity might be increased and strengthened, by the continual exercise of our faculties, directed to one class of objects, and their combined and reciprocal relations; where the habitual repetition of the practice would afford the grateful sensation of facility, and the discriminate variety of the objects give novelty enough to excite and keep up attention.

It must, however, be remarked in this place, that a voracious, disorderly appetite for this kind of reading will produce no intellectual benefit. After the mind, by a well-directed course of study, has become scientifically biographical, there can be presented no character, however apparently insignificant, but will offer some occasion for philosophic contemplation and profit; but, with some men, and especially in the commencement of the study, the fear is, that the dwelling indiscriminately on a range of unimportant objects, may encourage a desultory way of considering circumstances, and a fallacious, indefinite manner of representing them.

The continued study of common forms will never furnish the mind with those elevated and enlarged ideas that constitute the materials of a comprehensive system. It is upon these powerful principles the engine of advancement must be constructed. Those characters, situations, and sentiments, that seize upon the whole mind, and give lasting impressions of the great truths of moral evidence and the directing principles of moral action, are the important subjects of this study. Such are the species of objects which actuate the mental faculties with both energy and delight; and dispose these powers not merely to a capacity of receiving great conceptions, but

to the efficient faculty of communicating them to others.

The facts actually observed in general or individual history, can alone form the foundation of the philosophy of human life. By well-selected classifications of facts, by reiterated comparisons, and necessary exclusions, by a comprehensive yet guarded spirit of generalization and the patient process of legitimate induction, biography might receive fresh accessions of that universal science, which can apply established truths and general laws to difficult points; and perhaps even to cases, hitherto insolvable in human character and conduct. From continued operations, thus regulated and directed, from a constant examination of the different stages of human existence and their coincident relations, and from frequent comparison of various characters in the same stage of progression, and the same circumstances of local condition, we may, without much hazard of presumption, hope to derive a knowledge, which might, with judicious modification, be employed in the demonstration or solution of defective or complicated appearances.

As, in the concluding part of our Essay, we are collecting together the scattered rays that have been directed from different points upon the

phases of our subject, it may be allowed to repeat, that the hope of improvement in this grateful and interesting portion of literature, seems (in the light in which we consider—and have endeavoured to represent it) to rest upon the **METHOD OF INDUCTION**, which by its illustrious author has been applied to subjects of intellect and moral condition,* by a train of *observations*, as well as to the course of physical agencies, by a set of tangible *experiments*.

For this purpose, it is necessary that from a careful inspection and comparison of individual instances, we rise into those general forms which may bear application to local or particular cases. "The whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind."———"It must be an eye long used to the contemplation and comparison of those forms; and which, by a long habit of observing what any set of objects of the same kind have in common, that alone can acquire the power of discerning what each wants [or has] in particular."†

From all that has been observed, it will appear that this high biography must be carried on by

* Vide Part I. p. 93. Quotation from the *Novum Organum*.

† Sir J. Reyn. Acad. Disc. p. p. 76, 77.

artists, who have the happy gift of uniting in themselves two very distinct, and almost opposite qualities. There are men of science, who, from a microscopic examination of the minute particles of things, have, by such continued habit, disabled their mental optics from the power of considering them in their relation to composition. These acute observers view the parts of every object closely, and, as it were, in detail. They notice, with a penetrating eye, the difference of things, however subtle the distinction may be: they view minutely, but their perception is always that of accuracy and distinctness.—The other class, with a larger view, takes a due distance, and beholds objects in their general structure; in their compositions and configurations.* As the first were interested only in examining the differences of things, these are only engaged in contemplating their correspondencies. They take a sublime stand, and view the universal order of things as one stupendous whole. They comprehend the structure, and consider the compages, with an admiration that unfits them from giving a proper attention to the materials, or the connecting subjects of which the composition is formed.

* Vide Nov. Org. Aph. LV.—LVII. scilicet de Idolis Specus.

To constitute our philosophical biographer, both of these scientific tendencies must be united. In successive vicissitudes, he must examine the separate parts of his subject; and observe how their relations harmonize together as an aggregate whole. He must be capable of an attention acute enough to discern minuteness and penetrate detail, to investigate distinct principles and trace subordinate connections ; and, at the same time, he will be expected to possess that unifying comprehensiveness, that power of combination, which can view or dispose every part, as having relation to the general system. From the perceptions of art he must rise to the conclusions of science ; and, again, from the proportions of the general exemplar be enabled to apply tests of comparative adaptation to the individual form.

In concluding this series of remark and discussion, it will be perceived that the aim all along has been to consider biography in an exalted aspect, and as having immediate reference to our conduct as well as to our knowledge. That, as it would lead to a more perfect science of the nature of man, so that science would point out the true principles of deliberative action, and the just laws of social duty and moral government. In this view, Biography advances to a higher ground, and becomes an object of importance

as well as curiosity. . . We find our interests as well as our attainments concerned in the study ; and thus, considering it in a twofold operation, ethical and scientific, we may be induced to give it that degree of attention and regard which the combination of such important principles would seem to deserve.

The practical utility of these exhibitions and studies may be directed to different objects of science and morals.—Man, in his relative, and in his individual nature, his moral faculties and conduct, the operative power of religion and political institutions, national manners, professional habits, associations of interests and conception, the agency and combination of the passions, the influential relation between imitation and example ; and, above all, the practical direction of every observation and discovery to the purposes of education—these are the great foundations on which biography should be raised, to give her a dignified station among the arts that are valuable as well as delightful.

As the whole study is devoted to man, considered in his constitutional originality, as well as in his connection with society and with the effects of surrounding circumstances, every portion of the process will have regard to that end ;

and, in the more enlarged estimate of biography, will be directed to the investigation of the subject with the comprehensive views of general science, and the technical preciseness of individual discrimination.

“The great use of biography is to furnish mankind with a stock of moral facts; and thus to give to the principles of practical wisdom the certainty and stability of a science founded on experiment.”*—The virtues and the vices may be traced to incidents and examples working on flexible or kindred dispositions. In displaying the nature of the circumstances producing these effects, the operation must not only be philosophically laid open, but, according to our improved practice, the subject must be placed in such a view, as to furnish lights for imitation and practice. The beneficial effects of such contemplations have been always held up, as peculiarly appertaining to biographical composition: and though application may not precisely meet in every point, it is seldom but that, after due abatements and exclusions, enough will remain for practical comparison and advantage. For, though the great profit arising from biography is certainly derived by considering it in

* Anonym.

the light of an imitable example, yet it must never be forgotten, that there is no case, however similar, that can be so perfectly the same, as to call for a precise imitation in all its parts and bearings. It will be sufficient for all beneficial purposes, that the circumstances will so far bear a comparison, as to give the contemplator, from a general view of the instance, an opportunity of applying as much of its principle and specific purpose as may appear suitable; and, from a vivid consideration of the example in its actual condition and circumstances, admit him to adopt whatever may seem applicable, and square his opinions and conduct by the result of the combination.

Religion, whether considered in its influence on the character of the person represented, or as offering a subject for admiration and example, will ever hold its venerable station in regulated biography. The very act itself, of delineating or examining these exhibitions of the variegated life and wonderful faculties of man, is, assuredly, of religious import: and, in the study of human action and character, we are, as naturally, if not more efficaciously, led to discover and adore the wisdom of an omnipotent Creator, as in the anatomical contemplation of our material mechanism.

Political institutions affect the national manners and inclinations ; and both are determined by public events and physical wants. Hence the energy or depression of a people ; and on these the characteristic temper and disposition of the whole are founded. Floating in this stream of national manners, the subject of our speculation is always to be viewed ; more or less involved the general current, as he is more or less embarked or interested in the concerns of the public weal.

Professional biography has been remarked upon, both as it influenced the character of the subject, and in its improved state as affecting general science. In the latter view we should expect it to be essentially effective in the progress towards excellence, in the different department of art, science, or any of the active pursuits or vocations. From this meliorated process might be drawn principles and precepts, perhaps sufficiently practical and comprehensive to form an "ART OF ADVANCING." The maxims to be applied to this general mode of operation would all be collected from the result of a careful inspection and comparison of the actual phænomena, as decidedly appearing—in the intention or end of the operator ; the means that are used ; the ingredients to work upon ; the instruments to be

employed; the habits of dexterity to be acquired; the principles to regulate, the helps to be obtained, the obstructions to be avoided; and, lastly, the establishments of that scientific confidence, which completes all, and without which there can be no substantial advancement in professional excellence, or attainable enterprize.

The various associations arising from the relation of things, persons, and conceptions—together with the origin, nature, connection, opposition, and agency of the passions—form a combination of philosophical studies, which, though they will claim from the biographer the consideration their importance deserves, have been so much oftener handled, than many of the other topics collected in this discussion, that they may, valuable as they are, be left in their accessible repositories to the sedulous consultation of the student.

In treating of the moral faculties and conduct, the subject could not be abandoned without casting a passing glance upon the operation of moral example. But the influence of *example*, though most to be insisted on in the exhibitions of virtue and of vice, has a wide relation, and touches upon every point and portion of enlightened biography. Examples of valour, fortitude, self-denial, with their contraries, hold up

models to be imitated, or beacons to deter. The conduct of great men labouring under misfortunes, in difficulty, in danger, pining in exile, struggling with persecution, or wounded by ingratitude, has always furnished biography and history with their sublimest pictures. Though we have many such interesting representations in the pages of modern story, antiquity, in the portraits of some of her most celebrated characters, when labouring under the pressure of adversity, has, in faithful descriptions of their conduct, given lively examples of fortitude and of weakness—of noble forbearance and vindictive fury—of dignified activity and whining lamentation. For, whatever may be thought of the principles of Greece and Rome, considered as nations, the illustrious examples they have set before mankind, in the high-drawn characters of their principal citizens, as objects of praise and of vituperation, of imitation and of abhorrence, are highly entitled to the admiration, reverence, and gratitude of posterity.

The inculcation of the advantages resulting to practical education from an improved state of biographical composition and study has been the great aim of this Essay: and as the hopes of effectual operation in the one would seem to depend on the excellence and practical application of the other, it is trusted that too great a

stress has not been laid on the requisites and importance of such a composition. Besides, though hopeless of attaining perfection in any science or pursuit, still it has been thought a matter of advantage to place the model in the highest imaginable point of view. The Republic of Plato, the Utopia of Sir Thomas Moore, the Atlantis of Bacon, the Oceana of Harrington, and the Commonwealth of Hume, together with the Orator of Cicero and the Ideal Beauty of Raphael, are works of high estimation. And though no one, much less the authors themselves, could suppose the vast and magnificent plans they had laid down, the beautiful and splendid forms they had delineated, were capable to be reduced to practicable operation in every point and instance, —still the designs are studied and admired; they still are considered as structures composed of valuable materials—as models to be imitated in qualified proportions.

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ERRATA.

Page 76, Line 7, read *desultorie*.—line 9, read *absoluta ac completa*.

— 110, In the Note, read *On Madame de*, &c.

— 151, Second line from the bottom, read—Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

— 154, line 12, read—“ so responsible an office as *that* of the delineator, &c.

— 171, 174, and 175, for *tenure* read *tenour*.

— 184, line 14— for displaying read *unfolding*.

— 227, last line but one, Adolescence wants the first c.

— 265, line 1, for interior read *anterior*.

— 336, line 16, for department read *departments*

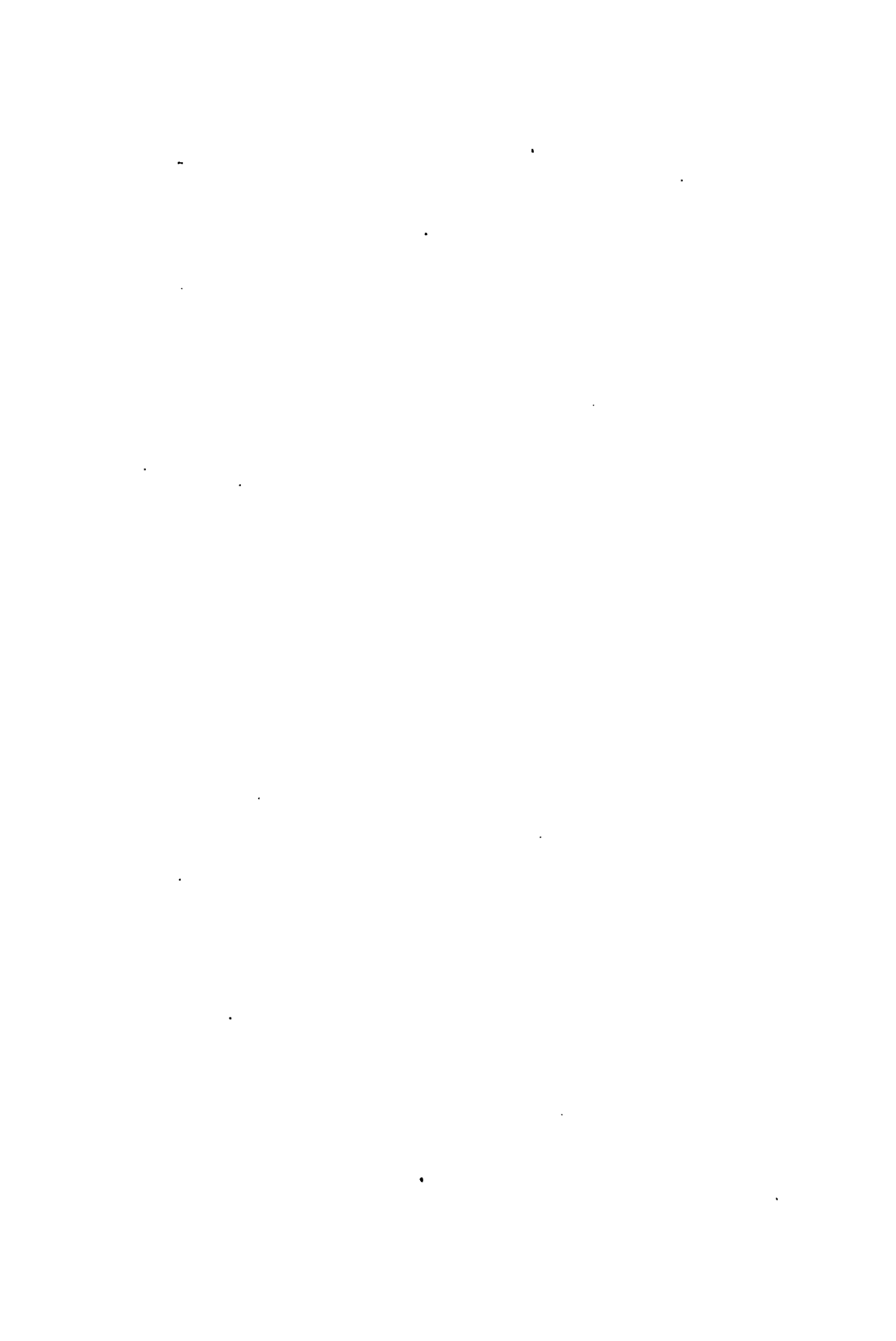
— 337, line 4, for establishments read *establishment*.



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